No. 684 FEB 5, 1910 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

TRAILING A SCARLET THREAD

"I'm the man you fear," cried Nick, jerking away the tablecloth on which lay the three revolvers. A glad cry came from the girl, while the ruffians looked on astounded.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*
Copyright, 1910, by STREET & SMITH.

No. 684. NEW YORK, February 5, 1910. Price Five Cents.

Trailing a Scarlet Thread

OR,

NICK CARTER'S DEATHWATCH.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A LIFELESS WITNESS.

It was precisely nine o'clock when Nick Carter arrived upon the scene, accompanied only by his chief assistant, Chick Carter.

The scene was a Park Avenue hotel, of considerable size and superior reputation, the manager of which was a personal friend of the famous detective, to whom he had telephoned for aid and advice immediately after the fatality was discovered. He was on hand to receive him at the street door twenty minutes later, moreover, when both detectives sprang from a taxicab in which they had hastened to respond to his summons.

"Well, Garrison, what do you say?" Nick inquired, after their greeting. "Something wrong, eh?"

"Wrong enough, Nick," Garrison gravely answered. "It looks to me like murder."

"H'm, as bad as that?"

"So bad that I want your opinion and advice before calling in the precinct officers. The reputation of my house must not be smirched, if it can be avoided. I know that you will be as considerate as the circumstances allow."

"Surely, Garrison. What are the circumstances?"

"A girl was found dead in a third-floor front just before I phoned you," Garrison explained, while they awaited the elevator. "One of the chambermaids saw a tiny thread of blood on the hall floor, and found that it came from under the door of the room mentioned. She notified me at once, and I went up there, entering with a pass-key."

"The door was locked, then," Nick remarked.

"Yes. The key was not in the lock, however, but was lying on a dressing table in the room. Evidently it had been placed there by the victim after she locked the door for the night."

"Well, what more did you find?"

"You shall presently see for yourself," Mr. Garrison replied. "I knew at once that a terrible crime had been committed, probably presenting a mystery that only a man of your discernment and acumen can solve. I made it a point, therefore, to be sure that nothing should be disturbed before you viewed the scene."

"Very good, Garrison," said Nick approvingly. "That was a wise precaution."

"I locked the room again, then hastened down to the office and phoned to you. That is the situation in a nutshell."

"Not quite," said Nick, smiling faintly. "You can tell me, at least, who the girl is."

"No, I can't, Nick, and that's one of the bad features," Garrison quickly replied. "I haven't the slightest idea who she is, other than the maid of a woman who came here about ten days ago."

"Did the two come alone?"

"Yes. The woman registered as Mrs. Nellie Barton, Washington, D. C. She said she might remain here for a month, possibly longer. She paid two weeks in advance, including board for both, stating that she might be absent at intervals, but that her maid would remain and look after the room and her belongings."

"I follow you," Nick nodded.

"Now, here's a curious point," Garrison added. "Mrs. Barton has not been here for a week, as near as I can learn, but the maid has remained all the while, taking her meals in the ladies' dining room and spending most of the time in her chamber. That is all, Nick, that I can tell you about them."

"Not quite," Nick repeated, as they entered the elevator. "You are, of course, able to describe Mrs. Barton.

"Why, yes, in a general way," Garrison admitted. "She is a woman approaching middle age, I should say, for her hair is quite gray and she wears gold-bowed spectacles. Her countenance and complexion are more youthful. In other words, she looks like one prematurely gray."

"I understand."

"She dresses exceedingly well and carries herself like a well-bred woman. I think she made friends with nobody in the house, however, but was as reserved as her maid has been during the absence of her mistress."

"Did the maid tell where Mrs. Barton had gone?"

"She told one of the chambermaids, the same who discovered the crime this morning, that she was away for a few days, but was likely to return at any time," Garrison replied. "She has not been seen in the house for nearly a week, however, as far as I know."

"Possibly she has been here without being seen," Nick said dryly.

"She may have wanted to get rid of her maid for some secret reason, and has contrived to turn the trick," suggested Chick, who had been listening to the colloquy. "Some closet skeleton may have been downed by the death of the girl."

"We'll see what we can make of it," Nick quietly observed. "Here we are."

The elevator had come to a stop at the third floor. In the corridor were gathered half a score of people, hallboys, chambermaids, and several guests of the house, among them a tall, clean-cut, dark-featured man of about forty, who turned a pair of piercing black eyes on the approaching detectives.

"It strikes me, Mr. Garrison, that you ought to call a physician," he remarked with conventional solicitude, as the three men drew nearer. "It may be, you know, that the poor girl is not dead."

Nick Carter glanced at the speaker a bit more sharply. Something about him seemed vaguely familiar to Nick, either his darkly sallow skin, or the subtle, metallic-like ring in his coldly complacent voice; but he could not recall when or where he had seen the man, if ever, nor the name by which Garrison addressed him when replying.

"I am sure the girl is dead, Mr. Denoir. A physician can do nothing for her."

"No, of course not, if she is dead," Denoir allowed, meeting the detective's searching glance without a change of countenance.

As Garrison drew out his key with which to open the door of the death chamber, Nick's eyes diverted to the floor. On the carpet near the inner jamb of the door was a stain of red. It was caused by a tiny stream of blood that had flowed out under the door and along the hall carpet. In the sunlight shed through an end window of the corridor, it glistened faintly, merely a scarlet thread on the darker carpet.

As the two detectives followed Garrison into the room, the same man who had addressed them, Denoir, stepped forward as if to join them. Chick turned at once and prevented him, however, saying politely:

"We shall have to exclude strangers, sir. We prefer to make our investigations alone."

The man drew back with a slight change of countenance, then shrugged his shoulders and smiled indifferently.

"As you like, of course," he replied. "I merely thought I might be of assistance."

"I don't think we shall need any," Chick answered a bit dryly, then closed the door.

As Garrison had stated, the room was in precisely the same condition as it had been found that morning. It was a handsomely furnished chamber, with a bathroom adjoining it. The curtains at both of the

front windows were closely drawn, but the morning sunshine falling on them filled the room with a subdued light.

Halting in the middle of the room, Nick gazed sharply around at the scene of disorder presented.

The bed had not been occupied.

In one corner of the room was a large trunk, the cover of which was raised. A tray belonging to it stood on end near by. In the bottom of the trunk were a number of small articles, wearing apparel; but dresses, undergarments, and the like were scattered upon the floor or tossed over chairs near by. Nick saw at a glance that all of these garments were of superior quality, indicating that Mrs. Barton was a woman of means and refinement.

The drawers of a bureau and chiffonier were pulled open and the contents of all were in much disorder, as if a hurried search in each of them had been made.

Though these features of the scene were quickly apparent, that which chiefly claimed Nick Carter's attention was the victim of the crime. The girl was lying on her back near the hall door, so near it that the door would have touched her if opened wide. Her arms were extended, her white face upturned. She was a girl of about twenty-five, with regular features, dark hair and complexion, and a good figure.

Bending above her, Nick saw at a glance that Garrison was right; that a murder had been committed. The girl's hair was in some disorder, indicating that it had been displaced in a brief struggle. On her throat and one side of her face were marks left by the fingers of some person, who had held her violently, evidently designing to prevent any outcry. The girl had been stabbed twice in the left side, nearly in a line with her heart. Her blood had formed a pool near the wall and door, in such quantity that some of it had found its way into the hall.

"Murder is right, Garrison," said Nick, after a brief scrutiny of the corpse and the surroundings. "That's evident enough."

"I should say so," Garrison groaned.

"You don't know where to reach the girl's mistress, Mrs. Barton?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Has any mail come here for her?"

"None whatever."

"Has she received any telephone communications?"

"I know of none, nor that she has been seen using the telephone."

"H'm, there's evidently a mystery here, as you say," Nick observed, again gazing around the disordered room. "We'll see what the evidence has to offer. To begin with, the girl has been dead several hours. The crime was committed late last night. Have any inmates of the near rooms reported any disturbance?"

"No, not a word."

"Was the electric light burning when you entered this morning?"

"No. It had been switched off, and the curtains were as you see them."

"The girl was seized by her assailant and throttled while stabbed," said Nick, crouching beside the body. "Notice the finger marks on her throat and the scratch on her cheek. The marks are too broad to have been made by the fingers of a woman. Her assailant was a man, I am very sure."

"A woman couldn't have done the job, Nick, unless one of extraordinary strength," Chick put in confidently. "The girl is well put together and must have been quite strong. She could have given any woman a battle for her life."

"True," Nick assented. "Lend a hand. I want to raise the body a little. We may find the weapon with which she was killed. Ah, I thought so."

On the floor under the corpse was found the blood-stained weapon. It was an ordinary dirk knife, with a blade nearly five inches long. Nick examined it carefully, but could find no mark signifying by whom it was owned, nor where it had been purchased. He laid it aside after a moment, then reverted to the body.

It was clad in a dark-green skirt. Instead of a waist, however, the girl wore a loose woolen blouse, similar to a kimono, which had been torn open at the throat, exposing her neck and breast. In noting these points, Nick discovered another, observable since moving the body.

The pocket of the skirt was inside out.

"Here is something of importance," he declared, with a glance at Chick. "There has been a careful search made here. It's evident on all sides. Even the girl was not omitted, for her pocket was searched. The hand thrust into it must have been that of a man, moreover, for it fitted the opening so tightly that, when he drew it out, he brought the pocket, also, turning it inside out."

"By Jove! there's no getting around that," said Chick. "It's makes a cinch of it, that the murderer was a man."

"It also shows that he expected to find something obviously of a character and size that the girl could have concealed on her person," Nick shrewdly rea-

soned. "Possibly he did not find it. A woman bent upon concealing anything on her person seldom hides it in her pocket. She resorts to—ha! I'm right. I'll wager we now have struck a clue worth finding."

While speaking, Nick had opened the blouse and linen undervest of the girl, and had discovered part of a sheet of ordinary letter paper, pinned just within the front of her corset. Removing the pin, he drew out the scrap of paper, which was about three inches wide and four long, and arose to examine it.

"H'm, here's another curious point," he muttered, when both Chick and Garrison drew nearer. "This paper has been rolled around something. Notice how it coils in my hand."

Nick displayed it in his palm. Though slightly creased from having been pinned to the corset, the crisp paper still returned to a small coil, or roll.

"It plainly indicates that it recently has been in that position and for some time," said Nick. "We'll see what message it conveys, that this girl considered so important. Well, by Jove! that may not be so easy, after all."

Nick had outsmoothed the paper and was gazing at the curious figures inscribed upon it.

CHAPTER II.

A KNAVISH DEVICE.

"Great guns!" Chick exclaimed, gazing over Nick's shoulder at the scrap of paper. "That is a curious communication, for fair. It looks like a rebus."

"It is, in that case, a rebus that we must contrive to solve," Nick gravely answered.

"Mostly pictures, ain't they?" questioned Garrison.

"Yes."

The paper presented, indeed, a curious appearance. Inscribed upon it with a pen were a number of neatly drawn pictures, mere outlines, in fact, extending in rows across the page. The first was a house, the second a road, the third a cow, followed by others unnecessary to mention at this point. Here and there among these outlines were numerals and letters, and Nick at once decided that the whole formed a somewhat extraordinary cryptogram, conveying a hidden communication which it might become imperative to discover.

"I'll hang onto this, Chick," he remarked, placing the paper in his notebook. "We cannot now take time to ferret out its meaning. We must look deeper into this evidence as a whole."

"It certainly looks so."

"See if any of these garments are marked, and whether any letters or papers can be found showing who these people are. In the meantime, I'll examine the trunk. It may show whether it came from Washington."

Contrary to Nick's anticipation, however, the search proved entirely futile. Though the trunk was nearly new, as well as quite a large and expensive one, it bore no name or initials, nor even an express label indicating from what part of the world it had come.

The same was true of the garments. The linen and lingerie were of the finest quality, the dresses stylishly made and of costly material, but not an article bore a mark of any description. Those of the makers and manufacturers, even, had been removed. Obviously, such steps had not been taken without a serious motive, possibly one involving the life of the girl found dead.

A deeper frown had gradually settled on Nick's face, one of mingled perplexity, annoyance, and determination. It needed only a crime and mystery of this kind to stir those qualities in his nature which balked against threatening failure, and his voice had an uglier ring when he broke the brief silence with which their vain investigations had been made.

"I'll be hanged, Chick, if I don't sift this affair to the bottom," he said abruptly. "Clue or no clue, I'll find out who this girl was, and who and where her mistress is, take my word for it."

"I'm with you, Nick, in that."

"By the way, Garrison, is this the only sleeping room occupied by the couple?"

"Yes."

"And no couch here, eh?" queried Nick. "It's a significant fact, then, that the two must have occupied the same bed when both were here. That's not common with mistress and maid. It points to other relations between them, a closer tie than that alleged."

"By Jove, that's true!" Chick exclaimed, quick to appreciate the significance of it. "There's only one trunk, too. The garments of both must have been packed in it."

"Surely."

"Here, what do you make of this?"

Chick had drawn forth something from some garments which he was inspecting, and he held in his hand—a somewhat disordered gray wig.

"Good heavens!" Garrison cried involuntarily. "That's Mrs. Barton's hair. I can swear to that, Nick."

"Mrs. Barton's hair, eh?" Nick dryly returned, while he examined it. "You mean, Garrison, the hair in which you saw her."

"Well, of course."

"Ah, here's the other."

"What's that? What do you mean?"

Turning to the dressing table in one corner, Nick had found among numerous other articles in a lacquer tray—a pair of gold-bowed spectacles. He glanced through the lenses, then turned and replied:

"The spectacles also worn by Mrs. Barton. The lenses, Garrison, are made of ordinary window glass."

"The devil you say!"

"Plainly enough, the woman wore both wig and spectacles only for a disguise," Nick added decidedly. "There's nothing else to it. In fact, Garrison, this may be the body of Mrs. Barton, and the maid the one who is missing."

"No, no, impossible!" Garrison hurriedly exclaimed. "That's out of the question, Nick. I saw both several times, and this girl is taller and stouter than her mistress."

"You mean, Garrison, than the woman who pretended to be her mistress," Nick corrected. "I now am convinced that their relations were of an entirely different kind. Of just what they consist, however, remains to be learned. I now see plainly that will not be an easy job."

"Here's something more, Nick," said Chick, who had started up to search among the numerous articles on the dressing table.

He held up a black lead pencil about three inches long, at the same time displaying in his palm a small twist of ordinary scarlet thread.

"Ah, I see," Nick quickly nodded, approaching to view them. "It's the pencil around which this scrap of paper was rolled."

"As sure as you're a foot high," Chick declared. "The paper was tied around the pencil with this piece of scarlet thread, which still is knotted and coiled. The girl merely slipped the pencil out of the roll, then dropped the thread from the coil of paper. Both were lying here in the tray."

"But why was the message, if such it was, sent in that form?" Garrison demanded, perplexed.

"Give it up," Nick answered shortly. "What is more to the point, Garrison, is the fact that it was sent. We may be able to find the bearer of it. Did anybody call at the office yesterday and inquire for Mrs. Barton's room?"

"I don't think so. After what has occurred, it would have been reported to me without delay."

"Obviously, then," Nick reasoned; "the pencil and paper most likely were sent by Mrs. Barton herself, who must have told the messenger the number and location of her room. No other person would have been likely to know."

"There's something in that, Nick."

"Sizing up the crime alone from the evidence at hand, aside from the motive and the true identity of the persons involved," Nick grimly argued, "it looks as if Mrs. Barton, absent for some unknown reason, had sent the girl a cautiously constructed message, probably along lines agreed upon, instructing her to pack up their belongings and join her at some place."

"Do you think she was packing the trunk when killed?" Chick inquired.

"I do," Nick nodded. "The blouse worn by the girl indicates that she was doing work in which she wanted on a loose garment."

"That's true."

"As you see, moreover, the wardrobe closet is entirely empty, as well as the bureau drawers. Here are several pairs of shoes near the trunk, which certainly would not be out here unless for the purpose of packing. The girl's assassin need not have brought all of those dresses from the closet, in order to search them. He could have done it as well where they hung."

"That's right, too."

"Take my word for it, the girl was packing the trunk, and the murderer afterward hauled out of it many of the articles now on the floor near it, in order to make his search."

"He must have known, then, that the girl received Mrs. Barton's instructions, assuming that the scrap of paper conveyed them," Chick argued.

"Exactly," Nick allowed. "I think he did know it, Chick, and either knew or suspected that a move was to be made; also that he killed the girl to prevent it. Garrison, who occupies the rooms adjoining this?"

"Only one room adjoins it, Nick," was the reply. "A corridor runs parallel with one of the side walls. The room on the other side is occupied by Mr. Denoir."

"The man who spoke to you as we came in?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"A stranger to me," Garrison replied. "He is registered as Paul Denoir, from Denver, Colorado. I understand that he is here seeking capital for Western mining ventures. That's all I know about him."

"Has he ever been here before?"

"I think not. I do not recall him."

"When did he arrive?"

"About a week ago."

"H'm, three days after this woman. Chick, ask him to step in here," Nick said abruptly. "His face impressed me as one I have seen before. I'll find out whether I am right."

Chick hastened to comply. The number of persons in the hall had not diminished, but increased, in fact; but he could not discover among them the man he sought.

"Where is Mr. Denoir?" he inquired, addressing them collectively.

"Gone out," one of the hallboys quickly answered. "'Bout three minutes ago."

Nick Carter heard the question and reply. With misgivings instantly augmented, he strode into the hall and inquired:

"Was he dressed for the street?"

"Yes, sir," cried the same informant. "He had on his overcoat."

"Any luggage?"

"No, sir."

"Watch here, Chick," Nick added quietly. "I'll return in a few minutes."

Without waiting for a reply, nor for the elevator, Nick hastened down to the hotel office. There he quickly questioned the day clerk, who had been on duty since early morning.

"Seen Mr. Denoir within a few minutes?" he inquired.

"Yes. Less than five minutes ago."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"Can't say, sir. He's gone for good."

"Gone for good!"

"Leastwise," added the clerk, "he paid his bill two hours ago. He brought no trunk, but had his grip in his hand when he went out. I saw him get it from the check room."

Nick did not wait for more. He dashed out into Park Avenue, but in no direction could he sight his man, nor could he learn from the several cabbies loitering near their vehicles in which direction the man had gone.

It so had happened that, either by chance or design, Mr. Paul Denoir had emerged from the house and slipped away unseen even by a hackman.

Nick did not undertake to trace him. Returning to the hotel, he hastened to the scene of the crime.

"The man next door has paid his bill and gone," he said with grim dryness, rejoining Chick and the hotel manager. "I want to look into his room, Garrison, without delay."

"This pass-key will open it," was the reply. "You can do so at once."

"Lock this door when we go out."

The room into which Garrison led the way was similar to that adjoining it. It presented at first sight no striking features. The bed had been occupied and one of the windows was open, admitting the crisp air of the October morning.

Several newspapers and magazines, some cigar ashes on the carpet and table cover, a crumpled sheet of plain wrapping paper tossed into one corner—these were the first to catch one's eye. The room looked as thousands of hotel rooms have looked after the departure of a male guest.

Nick at once began a careful inspection of everything in the room, however, searching the waste-basket, the closet, the bureau drawers, and dressing stand, in the hope of finding something, possibly a torn letter or some forgotten article, that would absolutely establish the man's identity.

The search proved futile, however. Mr. Paul Denoir had not left so much as a hair to be produced as personal evidence against him. Nevertheless, for nothing escaped his searching eyes, Nick Carter made one startling discovery.

While searching on the floor near the bureau, which stood against the wall between the two rooms mentioned, he discovered several tiny white particles imbedded in the meshes of the heavy Wilton carpet. Taking out a lens, he bowed lower and examined them.

"Particles of plaster," he muttered, then glanced up quickly at the ceiling.

It was handsomely frescoed and in perfect condition. Obviously, no plaster could have dropped from it.

"Haul this bureau aside, Chick," he cried, hit with a sudden conviction. "I believe the wall back of it has been tampered with."

Chick hastened to comply, exposing several square feet of the papered wall, over which Nick quickly passed his hand, tapping constantly with the ends of his fingers. Presently he struck a spot that sounded as hollow as a toy drum.

"By Jove, I'm right!" he exclaimed, bending nearer.

"A portion of this paper has been steamed or moistened, and carefully removed, and since has been neatly replaced. The edges where they join each other are hardly perceptible. The plaster back of it has been dug out."

In proof of his startling assertion, Nick coolly thrust his hand through the paper, quickly tearing it from the wall, and exposed an opening about eight inches square.

The design of this was at once apparent. The plaster had been carefully dug out, the laths cut away and removed, exposing the inner surface of the wall paper in the adjoining room.

Through this paper two small punctures had been made, about three inches apart.

Nick put his face into the square opening and found that he could plainly view the entire interior of the next room.

"Well, we've found the rat in the meal, at all events," he declared, rising to his feet. "The next step, Chick, is to trap him."

"Trap him is right."

"Good heavens, what an infernal device!" exclaimed Garrison, who had been gazing with awed eyes at the doings of the detective. "Carter, you're certainly a wonder. No other man on earth would have discovered that rascally trick so quickly. Unquestionably, now, Denoir was the murderer."

"I haven't much doubt of it, though he may have had a confederate," Nick replied. "The game of the scoundrel is apparent. He was on the track of these two women and contrived to get a room adjoining theirs. Plainly enough, he has been watching here for a week. The receipt of the curious message by the girl, followed by her preparations for a speedy departure, evidently brought matters to a crisis. I now am convinced that his search, after killing the girl, was for the paper she had received."

"Sure thing," Chick assented. "He may have seen her trying to translate it, and must have been after something recently received by her. He could have made an earlier search for anything else thought to be in their room, taking a time when both were absent."

"That's just the point," Nick nodded.

"But, if watching her through these holes in the paper, he ought to have seen where she concealed the message," Garrison doubtfully argued.

"He may not have been watching her just then," Nick replied. "He must have thought she had hidden it somewhere, but after his vain search was probably forced to assume that she had destroyed it."

"That may have been the case, of course. It's a mystery to me, for all that, how he got into the room without being heard by the girl. She evidently locked the door after entering."

"Pshaw!" Nick ejaculated. "The rascal had provided himself with a key to her room. He probably took an opportunity when she was absent yesterday, possibly at supper, and concealed himself in her chamber, lying low until he saw a chance to safely seize and kill her. That's all there was to that part of it. A lock is no barrier to such a knave. Come, we'll go back there. I want a look into the bathroom."

Returning to the death chamber, Nick soon ended his investigation on the immediate scene of the crime. He found in the bathroom only a soiled towel and some stains of blood on the marble washbowl. These were ample evidence that Denoir, after the murder, had coolly taken time to cleanse his hands before beginning the search that had followed. As coolly, too, he had awaited the discovery of the crime, presumably to see who took charge of the case and what was learned, or suspected.

"The rascal came from his room just before his flight," Nick remarked, as he emerged from the bathroom. "It's odds, then, that he was listening at the hole in the wall during most of our discussion."

"I guess there's no doubt of that," Chick allowed.

"He cannot have seen us, however, for the paper in his room must have been replaced over the hole during the night. He aimed, no doubt, to prevent the discovery of the opening as long as possible. Barring the few particles of plaster left in the meshes of the carpet, it might have been weeks before it was detected."

"It strikes me, Nick, that you are losing valuable time," Garrison ventured to suggest. "The scoundrel might be found and arrested, if an immediate pursuit was begun."

"Bosh!" Nick exclaimed. "A knave of his calibre is not so easily caught. He had the way paved for flight, as well as for the crime. He was safe from immediate arrest within five minutes after he left the house. Craft is what counts in an attempt to corral such fellows. I think I know a way by which I can catch him."

"Indeed!" Garrison looked amazed.

"At all events," Nick added, with grim significance, "I'll set a trap for the rat before the day is done. In the darkness of to-night he may run into it."

CHAPTER III.

SETTING THE TRAP.

"Trailing a scarlet thread, Nick, appears to be the job we're up against," Chick Carter remarked, as the two detectives left the hotel about eleven o'clock that morning. "If we can find the person who delivered that cryptographic scroll tied around a lead pencil, we should be able to learn who sent it to the girl, and also get definite information concerning the motive for the murder and the persons involved."

"It may be impossible to find the one who delivered it," Nick replied. "We'll take no steps that are likely to prove unprofitable. I shall not bother myself to communicate with the Washington authorities to learn whether a Mrs. Nellie Barton resides there. I'm satisfied that both the name and home address registered by the woman are fictitious."

"I guess that's true, all right."

"The same is true of Denoir," added Nick. "The relations between him and the two women date back of their arrival at the hotel, and we at present have no way of learning of what they consist, nor why this girl was murdered. The absence of the Barton woman, so called, is significant; but I feel sure that she had no deliberate part in the crime, though she may have been indirectly responsible for it."

"I see the point," Chick nodded.

"I propose, first of all, to try to get my hands on the criminal himself."

"Denoir?"

"Yes. I already have begun laying a trap for him."

"Indeed! How so?"

"I think he was after the scrap of paper sent to the girl, Chick, and that he gave up the search last night only because he felt sure she had destroyed it. If he was listening at that peek this morning, however, he knows it still is in existence and that we found it."

"Certainly," Chick assented. "I guess there's no doubt that he was listening."

"I'm very sure of it, for when he heard me mention the adjoining rooms, as if intending to visit them, he quickly took to his heels."

"Exactly."

"Now, here's another point," Nick argued. "Knowing the paper to be in existence, probably he still is very anxious to secure it. It's not reasonable to suppose that it has depreciated much in his estimation during the night."

"Surely not."

"As long as we are ignorant of its purport, however, we can only conjecture for what reason the rascal wants it so badly. But that's neither here nor there, as long as we are sure of the fact. That alone will, I think, throw him into our hands."

"By means of the trap you mentioned?"

"Precisely."

"What's your scheme?"

"I have ordered the body of the girl, together with all of the articles found in her chamber, removed to Hobart's undertaking rooms, on Third Avenue," Nick proceeded to explain. "I have arranged with the precinct police not to interfere with my plans."

"What's your plan in having them taken to Hobart's place?"

"The afternoon editions of the newspapers will contain sensational stories of the murder and the mystery involving it. Incidentally, I shall have each paper state where the body has been temporarily taken. They will enumerate also many of the articles removed there, including a curious pictorial communication found on the corpse. It will be stated that all of them have been placed in Hobart's rooms, pending further investigations, and with a hope that an early identification of the girl will follow."

"By Jove! I see what you're driving at," Chick exclaimed approvingly. "You suspect that Denoir, thinking the paper to be in Hobart's place, will make another desperate attempt to secure it."

"That's what, Chick, and an early attempt."

"To-night, eh?"

"If at all, Chick. I'll wager that he will waste no time."

"Sure thing, Nick, if he wants the paper so badly that he killed the girl in the hope of getting it."

"I think that's just what he did."

"You'll not leave the paper there, however?"

"Not by a long chalk."

"And what's your scheme?"

"There'll be a watch near that body to-night, Chick, in case the rascal shows up," Nick grimly answered, with a smoldering fire in the depths of his keen eyes.

"A death watch, eh? Yourself, I take it."

"You bet."

"By Jove! that's a trap, indeed," Chick declared. "It ought to catch the rat."

"We'll see," said Nick. "Here we are at the elevated. You now understand precisely what I want. I wish you'd go to the newspaper offices and arrange for the publication of a story that will serve my purpose."

"Sure thing," cried Chick. "I'll have it in every paper."

"Good enough. In the meantime, I'll slip round to Hobart's rooms in disguise and complete my arrangements with him. I phoned him I would call about noon. I want the run of his place alone to-night."

"Barring crook intruders," Chick put in significantly.

"Very true, but I'll be ready for them," said Nick pointedly. "I'll see you at home during the afternoon. We then will try to ferret out the meaning of this picture puzzle, provided nothing more important turns up."

Chick nodded and they parted at the corner, each hastening to complete the business mentioned.

It was four o'clock when Nick arrived at his business office, after perfecting his arrangements with the undertaker. He found two of his assistants, Chick and Patsy Garvan, earnestly discussing the crime and his trap for catching Denoir, and Patsy at once demanded eagerly, when Nick entered:

"Say, chief, don't I have a hand in the game to-night? Gee! I'd like at least a finger in the pie."

"Only Chick and myself," Nick said, with a headshake. "The pie may not be as palatable as you imagine."

"I'd like to try it, for all that."

"Two are enough," Nick insisted. "If Denoir goes into the trap, he will do so cautiously. There's no telling what confederates he has, nor how many spies may be watching Hobart's place, in case the rascal has any suspicions. He's no fool, take my word for it, and I'll not risk being seen around there."

"Mebbe you're right," said Patsy, a bit disappointed.

"Instead," Nick added, taking out his notebook, "there is something for you to rack your brains over. See if you can fathom it. It's a communication of some kind, probably conveying instructions to the murdered girl. I'll leave it with you this evening."

He tossed Patsy the pictorial scrap of paper while speaking, then glanced at Chick and asked:

"How about the newspapers?"

"All fixed," Chick nodded. "There'll be a proper story in each of them."

"Good enough. I'll get a bite to eat, then, and we'll head for Hobart's place directly after dark. You can be getting ready. In disguise, mind you, and a gun on each hip."

"Trust me for that," Chick rejoined, as Nick turned and left the office.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEATH WATCH.

Nick Carter was doing some close figuring. Assuming that his suspicions were correct, as well as his estimate of Denoir, he reasoned that only one contingency would prevent the rascal from entering the trap set for him—a bare possibility that Denoir, after reading the evening papers, would watch Hobart's place and fight shy, if he saw any one enter it and not come out.

Despite that there was a rear entrance, moreover, Nick resolved not to risk using it. Instead, accompanied by Chick, both in disguise, Nick entered an adjoining building about eight o'clock and went up to the roof, for which he already had planned. By means of a rope, both detectives then dropped to the roof of that in which the undertaker occupied the street floor and basement. There a skylight had been left unfastened for their use.

Before descending, however, Nick crept to the rear edge of the roof and looked down. The night was far from clear, with hardly a star to be seen between the banks of black clouds, and all he could discern forty feet below were several narrow rear yards, an open space back of an old stable, and the walls and roofs of lower buildings fronting on the next street.

"If he comes at all, Chick, it's a safe gamble that he'll come from that direction and tackle the basement door," he remarked, Chick having joined him in his inspection of the probable avenue of approach.

"Most likely. It matters little to us, so be it he comes."

"Very true. We'll go down and prepare to lie low. I've instructed Hobart to close up at nine o'clock and go home."

Quietly dropping through the skylight, the two detectives made their way down four flights of stairs and entered the quarters of the undertaker. They consisted of three adjoining rooms. The first was an office, fronting on the avenue, back of which was a middle room, in which was kept a display of caskets, inclosed on end in cabinets flanking two of the walls.

The rear room, into which Nick led the way, was the largest. It served at times as Hobart's workroom, and sometimes for the temporary keeping of bodies placed in his care. Only a very dim light relieved the gloom, in which objects could be seen only indistinctly.

There was a workbench near one of the walls. On end against the opposite wall were about a dozen plain

pine boxes, those in which caskets are inclosed, and which Nick had had Hobart bring up from the cellar for use that night. Reared upright against the wall, they looked ghastly and uncanny in the fickle light.

Closed shutters guarded the two back windows, which were several feet from the ground of the rear yard, precluding any ray of light from within.

Near the end of the row of boxes was a door opening upon a stairway leading into the basement. It then was closed and locked. Near the wall in an opposite corner was the trunk belonging to Mrs. Barton, so registered at the hotel, from which all of her belongings had been brought.

Most ghastly and impressive of all—on a bier near the two windows was stretched the corpse of the murdered girl. Entirely covered with a white cloth, it was the most striking object discernible in the dim light. The very stillness of it was impressive. The shadow of death seemed to hang around it.

A step in the adjoining room at once fell on Nick's ears, and Hobart appeared at the door between the two rooms, the middle one being in darkness.

"I heard you come in from the corridor," he said quietly, a bowed, grizzled man of nearly seventy.

"We're on time," Nick said simply.

"Is there anything you want?"

"Are you alone out there?"

"Yes. Many have looked into the office, but none have entered. There'll be nothing doing to-night. Business is very dull."

"No, I want nothing," said Nick. "Close up about nine and leave the office in darkness. We shall remain here until morning, unless something turns up. I'll put out this light."

"Very well."

The old man, not overpleased with the use to which his shop was being put, hobbled away in the darkness and returned to his office.

"Listen, Chick," said Nick.

"I'm all ears."

"We'll conceal ourselves in two of these boxes. I had them brought here from the cellar for that purpose."

"A good scheme."

"You take the one near the cellar door," Nick instructed. "It's odds our quarry will come from that direction, and bolt that way if he attempts to escape. You'll then be in a position to head him off."

"I see," Chick nodded.

"I'll get into the box near the head of the bier. I then can quickly nail the rascal, in case he attempts to search that trunk. This method will be better than hiding in the next room, for it's barely possible that he will show up from that quarter."

"That's right, too."

"I've had a rope loop attached to the inner side of each box cover, by which it can easily be held in place, yet so that we can peer out. Let the end of the cover rest on the floor and hold it by the loop."

"I'm wise, Nick, and ready when you say the word."

"There'll be nothing doing before Hobart closes up," Nick replied. "I'll douse this glim, however, as a last precaution."

"Let her go."

Nick turned out the gas and left the room in absolute darkness.

Leaning on the edge of the workbench, the two detectives waited patiently until Hobart closed his office. The bang of the street door reached their ears, the faintest click of the lock, and the rasping of the key when it was withdrawn. Then there was silence only, a stillness like that of a tomb.

Nick drew out his flash lamp after a few moments and shot a beam of light toward the line of tall pine boxes.

"To cover," he whispered. "We may be in for a tiresome vigil, but not a sound until the trick is turned, or all off."

"I'm good for it," Chick murmured.

He stole across the room in the beam of light and stepped into the tall box near the cellar door; then quietly drew the cover in place, leaving only a crack through which he could gaze.

Half a minute later Nick entered the one designed for his use, likewise adjusting the cover.

Again there was darkness only, save a silence that was faintly broken by sounds from the front street. As the minutes lengthened to hours, this gradually waned, and finally died away entirely.

Though taxed by the long strain upon nerves and muscles, standing upright in their close confines, not a sound came from either of the detectives. They were not less still, so far as the needs of the hour went, than the cold clay on the bier near by, all that remained of her in whose name justice now cried out for vengeance.

Though Chick heard him, being nearer the cellar door, a sound so faint that it barely reached his ears, even, Nick's first intimation of the presence of an intruder was a momentary flash of light. It shot across the room, leaped the length of the workbench, swept with lightning rapidity over the long row of tall pine

boxes, then lingered for the fraction of a second on the ghastly white object near the two windows.

Instantly both detectives were on the alert.

"By Jove! the rat is in the trap," flashed through Chick's mind. "It's up to Nick to spring it. I'll await some move by him."

"Caught, by jingo!" was Nick's mental exclamation. "I'll wait for a chance to nail him before he can pull a gun. Ah, the flash lamp again! He knows his business, all right. A mouse could not have entered more stealthily, nor move more quietly."

The beam of light had pierced the gloom again. It lingered a little longer on the covered form on the bier, then vanished like a lightning flash, leaving the darkness the deeper because of it.

Nick heard a stealthy step scarce ten feet from his concealment.

The light came—and remained.

Peering out of his box, Nick now saw the intruder, a dark figure only, dimly visible in the faint glow cast from the single bright ray from the flash lamp.

"Great Scott!" he said to himself. "A mere boy! This is not Denoir."

Startled by this unexpected discovery, puzzled as to the identity and mission of the intruder, whose face was visible only as a patch of white in the gloom back of the flash lamp, Nick deferred action until he could learn what the stranger intended doing.

He had not long to wait. The dark figure of the living had stopped beside the white figure of the dead. Nick saw a slender, shapely hand appear in the bright light shed upon the bier. Deliberately, as if with reverence or compassion, it drew down the white pall and exposed the upturned face of the murdered girl.

Then a moan, barely audible, reached the detective's ears.

Peering out, he saw the dark, boyish figure kneel beside the bier, laying one arm over the chill corpse, and then the deathly stillness of the room was broken by convulsive, low-drawn sobs that told of a grief beyond longer suppression.

"By thunder!" thought Nick, never much more surprised. "This must be the fellow who brought the girl that curious message. He knows now that it resulted in her death, and these lamentations indicate that he——"

Nick's train of deductions, in which the startling turn of affairs led him to indulge, was abruptly ended—terminated by a combination of circumstances utterly beyond anticipation, and which demolished in the twinkling of an eye his carefully planned rat trap.

Chick Carter's attention was diverted about this time by a faint creak from the cellar stairs, followed by a muttered oath, barely a breath, and the stealthy fall of feet on the threshold.

Two men had stolen into the room. Though they were scarce six feet away, Chick could hardly see them—two evil shadows a trifle blacker than the darkness.

Both had halted, as if suddenly turned to stone. The eyes of both had fallen upon the upturned face of the murdered girl. It now was ghastly plain in the steady beam from the flash lamp, and nearly so was the crouching figure at the bier.

"Per Bacco! The she-devil is here!"

Chick caught the words, a hissing whisper only, and also saw the move that accompanied them. It was lightning-like in its rapidity, much too quick to be prevented. The speaker whipped out a revolver and fired pointblank at the kneeling figure.

But there was no report—only the sharp, metallic click of the weapon's hammer, fallen upon a cartridge that missed fire.

Chick thwarted a second murderous attempt. With one hand he hurled the box cover squarely at the man with the weapon. At the same time, snatching out his revolver, he launched himself upon both intruders.

The effect was electrical.

On the instant the flash lamp went out, leaving the room in total darkness and an indescribable tumult.

The lithe figure beside the bier leaped up, as quick as a startled leopard, and darted away.

Nick Carter, who also had heard the ominous click of the weapon, sprang from his box and bounded toward the boyish figure at the bier. He was an instant too late. His outstretched arms clasped only vacancy. Turning quickly, he drew out his flash lamp and sent a beam of light around the room.

At the same moment, though the whole stirring episode transpired in less than half a minute, a cry for assistance came from Chick.

"This way, Nick," he shouted. "I've got him!"

Chick had more than he bargained for, however. His quick move to prevent one of the unknown intruders from again using his weapon had, in a measure, resulted disastrously.

As the box cover struck the rascal, both he and his companion seemed to realize that they were caught in a trap. An imprecation broke from one, a furious roar from the other, as the latter hurled the box cover in the direction from which it had come.

In the darkness that instantly followed, Chick fell

over the cover when leaping out of the upright box. He pitched headlong, with the velocity of a catapult, squarely against the nearer ruffian, hurling him from his feet and into the arms of the other, with a violence that sent both reeling against the nearest wall.

Chick, however, went to the floor with a crash that jarred every bone in his body. Instantly beginning to scramble up, nevertheless, he heard a quick step near by and threw himself in that direction, with his arms outstretched to grapple with, as he supposed, one of the two men.

Instead, just as he uttered the cries noted above, his arms closed around the figure that had been crouching at the bier of the murdered girl. One touch of the lithe, yielding figure was enough.

Chick realized at once that the figure was that—of a woman. It was the last he knew for several minutes, however. The gleam from Nick's flash lamp had shot across the room. The two rascals near the wall had regained their feet. With a single swift bound one reached the struggliing figures near by, and his clubbed weapon fell with a resounding thud upon Chick Carter's head. The detective dropped as if felled with an axe, senseless and bleeding.

The ruffian reached for the woman, obviously already convinced of her identity, despite her male attire—but the woman was much too quick for him. She turned like a frightened cat through the doorway near by and sped down the basement stairs in the darkness.

Both men leaped after her, just as the crack of Nick's revolver rang through the room. The bullet missed the head of the last ruffian by barely an inch, splintering the casing of the door through which he had vanished.

He had the nerve, nevertheless, of one accustomed to such desperate situations. He turned on the landing at the top of the stairs and closed the door with a bang, then secured it with a short piece of joist, quickly wedged between it and the opposite wall, for which preparations evidently had been quietly made before the rascals entered.

Taking place simultaneously, these episodes had occupied hardly thirty seconds, as stated; and Nick came crashing against the closed door only an instant after it was secured. It withstood the terrific shock. Nick heard the receding steps of the knave, as he dashed down the basement stairs, and he sent a bullet through the panel of the door.

It was answered with a derisive yell, followed by a mocking laugh, and Nick then bolted to one of the rear windows where, hurriedly opening the wooden shutter, he gazed out into the back yard.

Again, however, he was a moment too late.

The gloomy area, a low fence with an open gate, a stable yard with several wagons in it, the grim rear wall of the shabby old building, and a narrow passage leading to the next street—these were all that met his hurried gaze.

Neither of the fleeing persons could be seen, nor a sound heard denoting the course they had taken. That all had fled from the building, however, Nick had not a doubt.

"Fooled, by thunder!" he mentally exclaimed, not a little disgusted by the unexpected turn of affairs. "It's a cinch that pursuit would be useless. The rascals are a block away by this time—but only for a time. I'll land them later or throw up my commission. Now to see how badly Chick is hurt."

A groan from Chick at that moment, who was only stunned by the blow he had received, was the harbinger of his speedy recovery. Nick found him sitting up on the floor, after lighting the gas and hastening to join him.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, a bit anxiously.

"No, only a crack on the head," Chick replied, still a little dazed. "What's happened? The trick is off, isn't it?"

"Decidedly off for the present," Nick grimly answered. "They gave me the slip, the youngster included."

"Youngster be hanged!" Chick exclaimed, stimulated by the mere mention of the unexpected intruder upon the carefully planned affair of that night.

"What do you say?"

"That youngster, as you call him, Nick, was a woman."

"A woman!"

"As sure as you're knee high to a grasshopper."

"Oh, by thunder!" Nick cried, suddenly throwing up both hands. "I now see it all, Chick, from soda to hock."

CHAPTER V.

A LOST TRAIL.

"That woman in male attire, boys, was—two women."

This amazing declaration came from Nick Carter about seven o'clock the following morning, while seated in his business office with Chick and Patsy, after an unusually early breakfast.

"Two women, chief," Patsy exclaimed, staring. "Faith, it's lucky the mix-up was no worse, or mebbe she'd be half a dozen women, let you tell it."

"No, Patsy, only two," Nick replied. "That she was that many, however, I'll stake my reputation."

"What do you mean, Nick?" Chick inquired. "What two women?"

"First," Nick now explained; "one was the woman who registered at the hotel as Mrs. Barton, accompanied by a girl said to be her maid, since murdered during the woman's absence."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because she appeared there in disguise, was also in disguise last night, and, obviously, was attached to the murdered girl by a closer tie than that of mistress and maid. That was apparent in the evidence we discovered on the scene of the murder yesterday morning. It was equally apparent in the grief of the woman when kneeling beside the corpse last night. She went there to view the body, if for nothing more, and——"

"But hold on," Chick interrupted. "Why the dickens did she go there in that make-up and in the dead of the night? She could easily have obtained permission to view the body by daylight."

"Not without a risk."

"A risk?"

"Exactly. One, moreover, that she did not dare take."

"How do you make that out? For what reason?"

"You'll begin to see, Chick, when I tell you that I believe her to be the same woman we picked up so strangely just one week ago to-day."

"Oh, gee!" Patsy exclaimed. "That's who you mean by woman number two."

Nick nodded.

"You refer to the woman who lost her memory?" queried Chick.

"The woman who claimed to have lost it," corrected Nick. "We picked her up on the street, with a bundle of money and three dozen diamonds in her possession. She said she could not remember her name, nor where she lived. We brought her here, only to have her steal my revolver and give us the slip that very evening."*

"I remember it all."

"Next day we tracked her, as I supposed, to the house of Otto Sardony, the contractor, by means of his auto number. She wasn't there, however, but was in the house of a neighbor, Mr. Arthur Dante, the Italian importer, who had used Sardony's auto to aid her in escaping from us. Sardony's daughter was abducted the next night by three Carbonari agents, but was rescued by me after a strange meeting with the unknown woman, who then returned my revolver, but afterward refused to reveal her identity or explain her extraordinary conduct. I let it go at that, Chick, and it's an old story; but don't overlook one very significant fact."

"What's that, Nick?"

"That woman was disguised in male attire the night we encountered her in the Italian quarter, precisely the same as the woman was last night."

"By Jove, that's so!" Chick said more gravely.

"Here's another point," Nick added. "She was in fear of men said to be on her track. Isn't it a thousand to one that they were the Barbonari agents who abducted Sardony's daughter by mistake, having tracked the woman to his place by the same means as myself?"

"Yes, I'll admit that."

"Here's another," Nick went on. "This woman called Mrs. Barton arrived at the Park Avenue Hotel with her maid ten days ago. One week ago Denoir arrived there and got the next room to theirs. That was the very day we picked her up on the street, trying by a subterfuge to elude her pursuers. She did so, all right, but hasn't been seen in the hotel since that day. What's the deduction? Simply this: that she had reason to suspect her trackers had located her there, and she hasn't dared to return."

"You think, then, that Denoir was one of the Barbonari agents?"

"Yes."

"And that the woman discovered that he had the adjoining room?"

"Precisely. You remember the names of those three Barbonari rascals—Tony Demora, Philip Nicoli, and Robert Borgia. The last is under arrest, caught when we cleaned up the abduction case. I'll bet my year's income against an old straw hat, however, that Paul Denoir and Tony Demora are one and the same."

"There is a likeness in the names," Chick observed.

"And in the eyes of the rascal," Nick said significantly. "It was that which I noticed yesterday morning, leading me to think I had seen him before."

"The maid, if such she was, must have been waiting for the woman to return. She said she expected her to do so at any time."

"Exactly; but the woman didn't dare return," Nick forcibly argued. "There is some cause for deadly enmity between her and those three renegades."

*See NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY No. 683.

"I guess there's no doubt of that."

"Instead of returning, she sent the girl that curious message, tied around a lead pencil. It probably contains instructions for the girl to have followed."

"But why should she have sent it in that way?" Chick demanded. "She could have telephoned, or sent a letter, or——"

"Too many chances," Nick tersely interrupted. "Too much at stake. She probably had an understanding with the girl, Chick, that any message from her should be sent in that way, as positive proof from whom it came. It could have been dropped in the hotel corridor by the messenger, moreover, if so instructed, and at a time when the girl would be sure to quickly pick it up. A spy, then, might not have suspected her of receiving a communication, as would be the case if a letter, a telegram, or telephone message had been sent."

"By Jove! I guess you're right," Chick admitted. "There's no getting around such a string of deductions."

"Gee! I should say not," supplemented Patsy.

"What are you going to do about it, Nick?"

"I'm going to get the murderer of that girl," Nick forcibly declared. "He would have killed the woman last night, as you said, and I'm going to nail him before he can accomplish it. There are, to begin with, two steps that must be taken. This enigmatical message must be interpreted. You say, Patsy, that you can make nothing of it."

Patsy shook his head with a grimace.

"Divil a bit of sense can I find in it, Mr. Carter," he replied. "I've worked on it half the night. I'd have gone daffy for fair if I'd stuck to it any longer."

"I'll tackle it a little later," Nick said grimly.

"What other step must be taken?" Chick inquired.

"That woman must be seen and my suspicions verified," Nick replied, rising to get his coat and hat. "I must know exactly what lies back of this murder. The woman can inform me, I feel sure, and——"

"But where can you see her?"

"Possibly where I saw her last week—at Dante's house," said Nick, pausing at the door. "If I fail to find her, I'll tackle him for the information I want."

"I see."

"In the meantime, Chick, you go and square up with Hobart and see if anything else has turned up. We can return before noon, both of us, and I then may have some definite move to make. First, however, I want a word with that woman."

Nick left the house at once, and half an hour later approached that of Mr. Arthur Dante, an attractive wooden residence on Washington Heights. He slipped on a simple disguise before entering the place, knowing the woman, if there, might recognize and attempt to elude him.

It then was only eight o'clock, and the servant who answered his summons informed Nick that Mr. Dante was at breakfast. He was invited into an attractive reception room, however, and told a moment later that Mr. Dante would presently join him. This the latter did, entering the room with an inquiring smile, though Nick signified with a gesture that he wished him to close the door.

"To begin with, Mr. Dante," he explained, "my business with you is of a somewhat private nature."

The latter, though he had complied with the detective's mute suggestion, looked a little surprised.

"Yes?" he said inquiringly, waving Nick to a chair and taking one opposite. "Of what does it consist, sir?"

"I wish," said Nick, "to see the young lady who is stopping here."

"Stopping here?"

"Yes. The one who came here a week ago to-day."

"Dear me," Mr. Dante exclaimed, with affected ignorance, though Nick quickly detected an apprehensive gleam in his dark eyes. "You have made a mistake, sir. No young lady is stopping here, nor has been here."

"On the contrary, Mr. Dante——"

"Really, sir, I don't know what you mean by——"

"Oh, yes, you do," Nick interrupted more decidedly. "She came here in an auto belonging to Mr. Sardony, and was here one week ago to-night. If she now is here, I want an interview with her."

"But you are wrong, sir. There is no lady——"

"Stop right there, Mr. Dante," Nick broke in sternly. "I know what I am talking about and mean every word I say. There was a murder committed yesterday in a Park Avenue hotel, and I have reason to believe that the young woman I mention can give me valuable information bearing upon the crime. Understand me, however. I do not want the woman because I suspect her of having had a hand in the murder; but I do want the criminal, and I know that she can help me find him. I have absolute knowledge that she was here a week ago. If she now is here, I insist upon seeing her."

Mr. Dante, though he had turned very pale, shook his head decidedly.

"I cannot tell you anything about the woman," he said firmly.

"Cannot, Mr. Dante, or will not?"

"You may take it either way, sir."

"In that case, then, I must place you under arrest."

"Arrest?"

"Certainly. I have no alternative but to take you into court, where you will be compelled to answer."

Nick arose, frowning darkly, as if bent upon executing his threat without delay.

"Stop a moment, I beg," Mr. Dante hurriedly pleaded, obviously in much anxiety and distress. "I cannot possibly give you the information you want. I am not in a position to do so. Who are you, that you threaten to arrest me? What authority have you?"

"I am a detective," Nick replied, producing his card case. "If this woman made you her confidant, which seems highly probable, you must know I am informed of her presence here. My card, Mr. Dante."

It was accepted doubtfully, with trembling hand; but Dante's eyes no sooner read the name of the famous detective than a look of great relief appeared on his pale face.

"Oh, indeed!" he exclaimed. "You are really Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"Well, well, that puts a different complexion on the matter."

"How is that?"

"Because I now am at liberty to confide in you. The woman in question instructed me, in case I felt absolutely sure that any evil had befallen her, that I must appeal to you for aid and advice, and reveal all of the facts concerning her."

"Ah, that is more like it," Nick cried approvingly. "Call her here, then, and let her speak for herself."

"That is impossible. She is not here."

"Not here? Where is she?"

"I don't know. She left here five days ago. I have not heard from her since, Mr. Carter, nor have I the slightest idea where she can be found."

CHAPTER VI.

THE HIDDEN MESSAGE.

Nick Carter now felt sure that Mr. Dante not only was telling the truth, but also that he was inclined to be communicative. He resumed his seat, saying pointedly:

"Your statements are quite extraordinary, Mr. Dante. You assert, on the one hand, that this woman instructed you to appeal to me for aid; on the other, that you don't know where she can be found. Who is the woman, anyway?"

"I shall inform you in strict confidence, Mr. Carter," was the reply. "Her name is Marcia Canole."

"And her position?"

"She is a Secret Service agent in the employ of the Italian government."

"Oh, ho!" Nick quietly exclaimed. "That's the way the cat jumps. One of my own vocation, eh?"

"Exactly."

"What is her mission in America?"

"She is on the track of three criminals, all members of the Barbonari. They are wanted in Rome for the killing of two leading statesmen and the theft of important papers bearing upon the secret international policy of the government."

"H'm, I see," Nick murmured. "Very serious, indeed."

"The situation may be briefly explained," Dante proceeded. "The criminals fled to this country, probably designing to sell the stolen documents, if possible; but they no sooner arrived than they discovered that Marcia Canole, whose reputation in Italy is unsurpassed by any member of the Secret Service, was sharp on their track. She could not safely have the crooks arrested, however, lest the documents in their possession should fall into the hands of the American police, and ultimately reach the state department. She is out, so to speak, to secure those very important papers before undertaking to secure the men."

"Yes, yes, of course," Nick nodded. "From the standpoint of the Italian government, that is imperative?"

"Exactly," Dante assented. "Now, here's another feature of the situation: In a move made against the rascals soon after her arrival, Miss Canole succeeded in getting away with a document belonging to them and relating not only to their crime mentioned, but also to the secret doings and designs of the society to which they belong, the notorious Barbonari. She still has this document, the recovery of which is very important to the rascals. For that reason, it has served as a sort of protection from their stilettos. In other words, they cannot afford to kill the woman, even if an opportunity was presented, until they have recovered the document or know where she has concealed it."

"They already have recovered it, Mr. Dante," said Nick.

"What! Are you sure of that?"

"Yes; very sure."

"Why so?"

"Because they attempted to kill the woman last night," said Nick, who now clearly understood the situation, and for what reason so thorough a search had been made in the rooms of the murdered girl. "It would take me too long to explain how I know this, but I am convinced of the fact. She is the woman who registered at the Park Avenue hotel as Mrs. Nellie Barton, isn't she?"

"Yes, that is correct," Dante admitted, evidently much disturbed by Nick's assertions.

"Who is the maid, the girl murdered night before last?"

"Her name is Felicia Loti. She is Miss Canole's assistant."

"Why did Marcia Canole leave the hotel?"

"She discovered, while on the street one afternoon, that Demora and his two confederates were on her track, and she did not dare return to the hotel," Mr. Dante explained, confirming Nick's earlier deductions.

"That was the afternoon when I befriended her?"

"Yes. You already know the subterfuge she adopted, and how she fled from your house that night. In order that she might not be traced by the three men, she had turned her Italian notes into American money and a quantity of diamonds, which can easily be sold at very nearly their intrinsic value. She had them with her at the time, as you remember, and took them with her when she left here."

"Why did she leave here so quickly?"

"After her coming here, as you suspected, which was quickly followed by the abduction of Miss Sardony, Marcia knew that she had been traced both by you and the Barbonari; also that the mistake made would soon be discovered, and this house not a safe retreat for her."

"Ah, I see."

"She left here the next morning, therefore, with no definite plan or destination. Absolute secrecy, you understand, is her chief safeguard. She left here before daylight a week ago, since when I have neither seen her nor heard from her."

Nick Carter's strong, clean-cut face became exceedingly grave. The information he had received confirmed nearly all of his earlier deductions. He now understood the entire situation, the occasion of Miss Canole's strange conduct, her absence from the hotel, her secret flight, the murder of Felicia Loti, the search that had been made, the visit of Marcia to Hobart's undertaking rooms, presumably after the communication sent to her assistant, which, she must have reasoned, would reveal her whereabouts to Demora, if it fell into his hands and was rightly interpreted.

Nick saw plainly how the trap he had set for the supposed Denoir and his confederate had been spoiled by the untimely arrival of the woman, who evidently had contrived to enter the place just in advance of the two knaves, whose coming she did not suspect. What now had become of her, as well as Demora and Nicoli, of whose identity he no longer had a doubt, was the question uppermost in Nick's mind.

That this woman was one of his own hazardous vocation, moreover, and had instructed Dante to appeal to him in event of any unusual danger known to threaten her, had more than a cursory effect upon the great detective. None could have realized more keenly that the two knaves possibly had traced the woman after her flight the previous night, and none could have felt a stronger impulse to aid, and, if necessary, rescue her from the fate by which she was menaced.

All this appeared in the gravity with which Nick asked, after a moment's thought:

"Have you any idea at all, Mr. Dante, where Miss Canole would have been likely to seek a refuge after leaving here?"

"Not the slightest idea, Mr. Carter," was the reply, earnestly made.

"How happened she to appeal to you a week ago?"

"Only because I long have been a friend of her family in Rome, and one on whom she knew she could safely rely."

"As a matter of fact, then, you now have given me all the important information you can impart?"

"I have, Mr. Carter, on my word."

"That is all, then," Nick declared, rising. "I have only a word to add. Keep quiet about this matter. Make no statements whatever until after you hear from me again."

"I understand," Mr. Dante replied, while he accompanied Nick to the door. "I should be silent, however, without your instructions."

"Very good," said Nick. "I'll continue my work on the case without delay, then, and in my own way. Good morning."

He did not wait for an answer. He knew there was no time to be lost. He felt instinctively that the trap he had set for Denoir, in reality Tony Demora, had served only to endanger Marcia Canole, whom he now was eager to serve.

Hastening home, he found that Chick had just re-

turned from his interview with Hobart, and that nothing new had been discovered. In a very few minutes Nick informed both of his assistants of what he personally had learned, and how seriously he now regarded the matter.

"There's only one thing that may enable us to quickly pick up the lost trail," he said in conclusion.

"Miss Canole's message to her assistant?" queried Chick.

"Exactly," Nick nodded. "Let me have it, Patsy. I'll set my head to work and see what I can make of the picture puzzle."

"Gee!" Patsy exclaimed, as he complied. "If it muddles your block as it did mine, Mr. Carter, I'll bet we hear something drop around here."

Nick made no reply. There was a look of ugly determination in his eyes as he seated himself at his desk and spread open the baffling sheet of paper. The characters neatly drawn upon it with a pen were as follows, each line respectively containing those enumerated in the paragraphs below:

A small wooden house, a road, a cow, a compass with its needle pointing nearly west, a guideboard marked, "Oak, one mile."

A trunk, a wagon, a railway station.

A girl.

Three men running.

Between each of these pictures, or penned outlines, were either a digital number or a printed capital letter.

Such was the curious combination of pictures, numbers, and letters that had completely baffled Patsy, and which Nick Carter grimly undertook to interpret. He accomplished it, too, though not in a moment. For the usual process of reasoning by which an ordinary rebus may be solved proved entirely futile, educing nothing at all intelligible.

Nearly three hours had passed, in fact, before Nick hit upon a key to the mystery, and he then was flushed and heated by his intense mental application, his hair in disorder, and his collar limp and wilted.

"I have it, boys!" he finally shouted. "I've got it pat."

His assertion brought both Chick and Patsy to the back of his chair, eager to learn what he made of the curious combination.

"It's as plain as twice two—when you see it," he dryly declared.

"That's all right," Patsy growled. "But it took an eye like a Lick telescope to see it. You're not so rapid, Mr. Carter, yourself."

"Very true, but I've got there all the same," laughed Nick. "Now, look here and I'll elucidate the problem."

"Cut loose, sir."

"To begin with, these letters and numerals have no significance whatever," said Nick. "One is inserted between each of the pictures only for a blind, in order to complicate the message if it fell into the wrong hands. They must be eliminated entirely, and only the pictures interpreted. I got wise very quickly after tumbling to that."

"But what do you make of the pictures?" Chick demanded.

"Take those on the first line," Nick proceeded. "The first is a small wooden house. It signifies the house in which Marcia Canole has taken refuge. I got that from what follows."

"A road and a cow," Patsy put in. "Mebbe she's turned dairymaid."

"Hardly," said Nick. "The Jersey is one of the choice breeds of cow. The cow in this case signifies Jersey City, and the road a thoroughfare leading out of it, on which the house is located."

"Oh, holy smoke!" cried Patsy, with eyes dilating.

"Next we find a compass with the needle pointing nearly west, and a guideboard marked, 'Oak, one mile.' Now, there's no town or suburb of that name in these parts, to which the guideboard might point. Plainly, then, that's the name of a road running west from Jersey City, and the road on which the house is located, one mile from town."

"By Jove! Nick, I guess you're right," Chick said earnestly.

"On the next line we find a trunk, a wagon, and a railway station," Nick went on. "Obviously, Marcia Canole instructed her assistant to pack their trunk and send it in a wagon to some railway station, presumably to leave it there until called for."

"Right again, Nick, as sure as you're a foot high."

"It is confirmed by the single picture on the next line, that of a girl," said Nick. "She is alone on a line, you see. That signifies that the girl should come alone to the house indicated by the foregoing instructions."

"But the three men running!" cried Patsy, with some chagrin at his own failure to interpret the pictures. "What do you make of them?"

"Simply, Patsy, that great haste was imperative," said Nick, with a confident nod. "Marcia Canole wanted the girl to lose no time. And that is why Felicia Loti, presumably very soon after this paper was received, was packing the trunk on the evening

she was murdered, precisely as I deduced on the scene of the crime."

"By gracious, Nick, you've got a long head, for fair!" Chick said admiringly.

"Long, is it?" cried Patsy. "Faith, that's no name for it. It's as long as the head of a horse, the which just fits in a barrel. Sure, chief, it's me that's more than proud of you."

Nick Carter laughed and arose from his desk chair.

"Oh, it wasn't so very blind, after all," he said indifferently. "The letters and numerals fooled me for a while. The insertion of them was a neat trick, and the whole thing shows that this Marcia Canole is, as I said when she gave us the slip a week ago, a remarkably keen and clever woman."

"As well as deucedly handsome," put in Chick.

"That's right, too."

"What's the next move, chief?" Patsy asked eagerly. "You reckon, you said, that these Barbonari chaps might have traced her from Hobart's joint. Ain't you going to find out whether that's right, and lend her a hand in case they have nailed her?"

"You bet I am," Nick grimly declared. "We'll all have a hand in that. I'll state my plans in a nutshell, boys, and then we'll get a move on."

CHAPTER VII.

A SHREWD MOVE.

That Nick Carter had hit the nail on the head appeared in that he had no great trouble in locating a small wooden house about a mile west of Jersey City, somewhat isolated and about a rod back from the suburban road which he had traversed alone and on foot late that afternoon.

With a view to every possible contingency, Nick was very carefully disguised. He wore a seedy brown coat, a woolen shirt, tied at the throat with a red scarf, and on his head a soft gray hat, much the worse for time and wear.

With darkened features and heavy brows, and his firm mouth hid by a drooping black mustache, one would ordinarily have taken him for an Italian of the lowest class, whose sinister face denoted a readiness for any evil work that might prove remunerative.

Nick reasoned that he might run foul of Demora and his gang, if the rascal had other confederates besides Nicoli, and he had laid his plans accordingly, assigning to Chick and Patsy important work along other lines.

Nick surveyed the house sharply while he approached. It was quite old and faded, a small cottage of one story and a half, with a porch at the rear. The yard in which it stood had run to rank grass and tall weeds, and the place looked as if long deserted.

"H'm, not very promising, after all!" Nick muttered to himself. "Curtains down at every window, or the blinds closed. It looks as if the crib was vacant. I'll soon find out."

Without attempting to raise any one by knocking, Nick walked around to the rear of the house. There he found the grass much trampled down and the porch door ajar.

"By Jove, the rascals have been here!" he growled, under his breath. "May be here now, for all I know, though it's not likely. This grass never was trampled down in this fashion by the feet of a woman. I'll have to look inside, let come what may."

Shifting a revolver to his side pocket, Nick quietly opened the door and looked into the porch. It was still and deserted. The door leading into a kitchen was open also, but the silence within was unbroken.

Constantly on his guard against trickery, lest his approach had been stealthily watched by some person within, Nick stole into the kitchen, and then through the hall and into the adjoining rooms. Each of them was cheaply furnished, a bit damp and musty, and all were deserted.

"This looks as if the woman rented the place furnished," Nick shrewdly reasoned, correctly sizing up the evidence. "It probably was advertised, and she must have secured it for a temporary refuge, afterward sending that message for the Loti girl to join her here. I fear it has proved costly."

The search then begun by Nick soon confirmed his misgivings. In a small workbasket on a stand in the sitting room he discovered, among others, a spool of scarlet thread, precisely like that with which the scrap of paper sent to Felicia Loti had been tied around the pencil.

In an old desk near by, moreover, was the remainder of the sheet from which the paper had been torn.

"Trailing a scarlet thread, as Chick put it, is right," Nick said to himself, frowning grimly while he continued the search. "I've run down the thread, all right, but what of the woman? It's a hundred to one that Demora ran her down after last night's racket in Hobart's place, and now has her in his clutches."

Confirming this, in a measure, Nick found in the dim entry the tracks of muddy feet, obviously those of

several men, and also a scrap of black lace, as if torn from a waist, or wristband, during a struggle. Further search disclosed that two of the window cords had been cut and removed, and Nick at once conjectured that they had been used for binding the woman. He sat down in the silent sitting room to think it over.

"They're got her, all right," he grimly reasoned. "There isn't a doubt of that. If so anxious to turn her down, however, why the dickens didn't they kill her here in this deserted old crib, instead of removing her and taking chances of detection?

"H'm, by Jove, it may be that I'm mistaken in thinking that they have found that document Dante mentioned, which she stole from them and I supposed they had recovered. I was cocksure they had, or would not have attempted to shoot her last night. Possibly that may have been done under impulse."

The longer he thought about it the stronger grew his conviction that he now was right, that the rascals had, instead of killing Marcia Canole, removed her for safe keeping, until they could force her to give up the document, or to reveal its hiding place.

"By Jove! it's not reasonable to think she would have been carrying it on her person," Nick said to himself, suddenly starting up. "She may have concealed it in this house. The most likely place would be in the cellar, in case the building should burn down. I'll have a look down there, at all events."

The sun had set during the time required for his investigations, and the dusk of early evening was beginning to gather. Nick looked around for a lamp, but could not find one with any oil in it.

In a wall cupboard, however, he finally discovered a partly burned candle in an old tin candlestick, a glance at which convinced him that it had been used the previous night.

Having lighted it, Nick made his way to the cellar, a dismal little hole scarce ten feet square. It presented but few places in which a document or a paper of any kind could be wisely hidden, and the keen and experienced eyes of the detective soon fell upon a few grains of sand and mortar lying on the cement floor near one of the stone walls.

At once convinced that one of the stones had recently been removed, Nick very quickly located it—a small, angular stone about a foot from the floor.

Gently removing the stone, he found what he was seeking—a folded sheet of parchment-like paper, much wrinkled and soiled on one side, while the other was entirely covered with finely penned writing.

"Exactly as I suspected," he muttered, while he briefly examined the writing. "In Italian, eh? I'll not take time to translate it. Just as I inferred, the woman had hidden it as a safeguard against the rascals, who must have got away with her last night, after tracking her to this place.

"It's odds that they'll not kill her, then, as long as there's a chance to force her to reveal its hiding place. The delay may enable me to locate her. I'll replace the stone, lest the rascals return to make a search here, and suspect that the paper has fallen into other hands."

While thus musing, Nick set the stone in place again, then returned to the sitting room. Still wondering how he could contrive to trace the woman, whom he now felt sure that Demora and his gang had removed to other quarters, it occurred to Nick that he had better find out, if possible, whether she had discarded the male attire in which he last had seen her and resumed garments becoming her sex.

"I'll have a look in her sleeping room," he said to himself. "If the male suit is there, it's a safe wager that she had got into her own togs before the miscreants took her away."

Mounting a narrow flight of stairs, Nick entered a front bedroom and glanced sharply around. The bed had been slept in since being made up, and most of the clothing was thrown over the footboard. Hanging on the back of a chair near by was a man's suit and a flannel shirt, evidently tossed aside when discarded.

"Ah, she must have arrived safely last night, after all," thought Nick, quickly sizing up the circumstances. "Otherwise, the garments she then wore would not be here, nor would the bed have been occupied. Evidently, then, she was not caught napping by the gang until to-day. It's a conundrum, by Jove, how I am to quickly trace her."

An answer to the conundrum, however, was presented much sooner than the detective expected. As he was about to leave the room, Nick was holding the candlestick a bit carelessly, and the candle slipped out of the socket and fell to the floor. In an attempt to catch it before it should burn the faded woolen carpet, Nick dropped the candlestick also, and it rolled under the bed.

"Hang the thing!" he growled to himself. "I'll not bother to crawl under the bed after it. There's nothing for me to remain here much longer, and the candle alone will serve my purpose."

He picked it up between his thumb and fingers, then started on his return to the sitting room.

Folded in his hand, he still held the flimsy sheet of paper found in the cellar. Thinking he might wish to translate it before leaving the house, he had deferred putting it in his pocket.

With the candle in one hand, therefore, and the paper in the other, Nick returned to the sitting room. He had hardly crossed the threshold, however, when the silence was abruptly broken by two quick, curt commands, as threatening as the snap of a bear trap.

"Don't drop that candle, or we'll drop you with a bullet! Stand still, or you'll be a dead one!"

Though a bit startled, Nick met the situation without the slightest sign that would have betrayed his identity and vocation. Hardly stirring, in fact, he glanced toward the hall door, then at another leading into an adjoining room.

On the threshold of both stood a man with a leveled revolver, and back of them was the grim, frowning face of a third man. The two with the weapons were instantly recognized by Nick, despite that he had seen them only once before.

One was Antonio Demora; the other, Philip Nicoli.

Each now wore the same disguise as when Nick had encountered them in the Italian quarter of New York a week before. Though most men would have been staggered by such a turn of affairs, it suited Nick Carter to the letter. He at once saw the possibilities it presented.

Like a flash, moreover, the truth dawned upon him—that these rascals, having Marcia Canole in safe keeping, had returned to search this house for the paper known to have been in her possession, and the hiding place of which she presumably had refused to disclose.

Nick knew, furthermore, that the knaves must have seen the light of his candle when they were approaching, and had stealthily entered the house while he was in the chamber, so placing themselves as to safely hold him up when he returned to the sitting room.

That the incriminating paper was their quest, said to record secret criminal projects of the Barbonari, Nick had not a doubt; and in view of the threatening situation, and the imminent probability that he would be searched and the paper then in his hand inevitably discovered—in view of all the contingencies, Nick Carter made a most remarkable move, one demonstrating both his keen measurement of the blindness of most men and his own marvelous tact and resources.

Without a moment's hesitation, as the truth flashed through Nick's brain, he shifted the candle to his right hand, then deftly twisted the much-desired paper around the lower end of it, as if he had been using it in lieu of a candlestick. This done, and it required only an instant, he coolly offered both to Demora, who had glided nearer with his revolver still covering the detective's breast.

"Per Bacco!" Nick exclaimed, with the action, as if a bit dismayed; and then added in broken English: "You taka da candle, boss, and you den be sure it no drop. Me no lika da chance."

And Nick coolly thrust the wrapped candle into the hand Demora almost involuntarily extended to receive it.

Surely, indeed, the very last place in which a man would look for something sought would be—*in his own hand.*

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S SUBTERFUGE.

Though Tony Demora had accepted the lighted candle, little dreaming what inclosed the lower end of it, there was an ugly gleam in his black eyes as he stood regarding the disguised detective.

It softened slightly, however, when Nick uttered an ejaculation in Italian, and then addressed him in the peculiar broken English characteristic of the swarthy sons of sunny Italy.

"How's this?" he asked, with a growl, while his two confederates also stepped into the room. "Are you an Italian?"

He now spoke in Italian, with which Nick was familiar, and the detective at once replied in that language, in which the subsequent intercourse was conducted.

"Yes, to be sure. What did you think?"

"What are you doing here?" Nicoli demanded.

"I might ask you the same question," Nick coolly answered, glancing at him. "I'm looking for somebody—and something."

"*Sapristi!* You'd better be civil, or——"

"Leave him to me, Nicoli," Demora interrupted, in an authoritative way. "You answer and not question, my man, or you'll get the worst of it."

"I've got that already," Nick retorted. "You are three to one."

"What's your name?"

"Pasquale Sacco," said Nick promptly.

"You'd better tell the truth."

"That's the truth."

"What are you doing in this house?"

"I've told you," growled Nick. "I'm looking for something."

"Looking for what?" snarled Demora, with a threatening gesture. "Out with it, or you'll feel the prick of a stiletto."

Nick pretened to be sufficiently intimidated to explain—but only as served his own purpose.

"I'm only trying to find it for another," he said. "It's only a letter, or the like, belonging to a friend of mine."

"Friend of yours?" queried Demora, with eyes dilating. "Where is he?"

"I'd better not say," Nick demurred.

"On the contrary, Sacco, you much better say," was the threatening retort. "Out with it—where is he?"

Nick glanced from one to another of their frowning faces, then reluctantly admitted:

"He's in New York, in the city prison."

"A crook, eh?"

"Most likely, since he's there. I've only been out two days."

"Is that where you got acquainted with the man?"

"No. I used to know him in Italy, before I came to this country."

"What is his name?"

"Borgia."

"What!" cried Demora, starting. "What's his full name?"

"Robert Borgia," said Nick coolly.

It was a shrewd move—this claiming a prison-made friendship with the recently arrested confederate of these men. Nick had quickly seen the possibilities thus presented, and the result proved to be all that he anticipated. For Tony Demora, completely blinded by the masterly subterfuge, began to relax and become friendly from that moment.

"See here, Sacco," he said. "How did you happen to meet Robert Borgia in prison?"

"His cell was next to mine."

"You had some talk with him?"

"Yes, much talk. About old times and——"

"Never mind about that part of it," Demora interrupted. "How could he tell you about anything to be found here? Being in prison, he knows nothing about this place."

Nick was ready with a plausible explanation.

"He didn't tell me about this house," he replied. "He told me about the paper I mentioned, and about a woman who has it. I happen to know her by sight, for she was after me not so long ago that I'll soon forget her face."

"A police agent, eh?"

"Yes."

"What's her name?" asked Demora, further convinced that Nick was telling the truth.

"Marcia Canole," Nick replied.

"What had you done that she got after you?"

"I got drunk one night in Genoa and stabbed a French girl—but the fault was all hers."

"Yes, of course," Demora said, with a grin. "Did she die?"

"I didn't wait to see," Nick replied, with a dryness that brought a laugh from all three rascals.

"It's not safe to wait long, Sacco, after using a stiletto," said Demora pointedly.

"That's right, too."

"What did Borgia tell you about Marcia Canole?"

"He told me she had a paper he wanted; also two friends of his who now are in New York," Nick glibly explained.

"Anything more?"

"He said they'd pay me well if I could run across her and could get it. I didn't think much about it until I got out two days ago, after paying a fine."

"What made you think of it then?" Demora continued to question.

"Because I saw the she-devil on the street," Nick grimly snarled. "That made me think of it, all right."

"On the street?"

"Yes. She was dressed like a man, but I knew her—you can bet I knew her! I'll never forget her infernal face."

"What did you do?"

"I kept on her track and saw her go to a hotel in Park Avenue."

"Is that so?" Demora's eyes took on a sinister squint.

"Yes," Nick went on, as if he had not observed it. "But she only went up in the elevator and through one of the corridors. Then she came out again. I kept near enough to her, mind you, to see all that."

"That must have been how she got that paper to the girl," Demora muttered, glancing at Nicoli, who nodded darkly.

"That's what?" questioned Nick, as if a bit suspicious.

"Nothing," said Demora shortly. "Business of our own. Did you continue to watch her?"

"Yes. I saw her come to this house, but I wasn't prepared to take chances with her at that time. She's quick with a gun."

"What did you do?"

"I went back to my home in the city," Nick continued, frowning, as if in hatred of the woman. "I came here again to-day, about an hour ago, with a gun of my own. I had made up my mind to kill her, in pay for the past, and then get the paper Borgia told me about. But she wasn't here. I found the house open, but the bird had flown."

"Flown is right, Sacco," Demora said, smiling oddly. "What were you going to do with the paper after you had found it?"

"What Borgia told me to do with it," Nick replied.

"What was that?"

"He told me to find a man named Tony Demora, now in New York, who would pay me well for it," Nick explained artfully. "I could find him, too, if he is there, for I know all the Italian quarter. But what use to find him, since I can't find the paper?"

"You were looking for it?"

"Yes, from cellar to bedroom."

"That's bad."

"Yes. I began to fear the she-devil might return, you see, and I was coming down to lie in wait for her. Madonna! I can see her finish."

Demora laughed aloud at the murderous gleam that flashed from Nick's eyes with the last. He thrust his revolver into his pocket, signing for Nicoli to do the same, and then he held out his hand to the detective.

"I guess you're all right, Sacco," he said approvingly. "You must have told me the truth, or you couldn't have told me so much."

"The truth, yes," said Nick, shaking hands with Demora, as if much surprised at the privilege suddenly offered. "Why should I lie about it?"

"For no reason."

"That's right."

"I now will tell you something," said Demora, in much more friendly fashion.

"What is that?"

"We also are friends of Borgia."

"You!" Nick exclaimed, with affected amazement.

"Yes. I am Tony Demora."

"Oh, is that so?"

"And this is Philip Nicoli," added Demora, by way of an introduction. "This other man is Domenico Russo. We, also, are in search of that paper."

"*Dio!*" Nick exclaimed, with a smile. "I begin to see. I'll bet two to one, though, that you'll not find it," he added to himself.

"If you have a fancy to do so," Demora went on; "you can help us make the search. Afterward you can go with us. We can show you where your friend is."

"My friend?"

"Marcia Canole," Demora cried, with a laugh.

"Yes, and put you in a way to slip a blade between her ribs, if that's to your liking," supplemented Nicoli, with brutal levity.

Though scowling darkly, Nick pretended to be well pleased.

"It would be more to my liking to try making friends with her," he pointedly replied. "You've got her, then; I take it."

"Well, rather!" said Demora.

"Where?"

"You shall see—provided you agree to cast your lot with ours."

"Do you mean that last?"

"I do."

"For what reason?"

"Because you are acquainted here and familiar with New York, and we can use you to advantage, and pay well for the service."

"That's good enough for me."

"What do you say, then?"

"I say I'll do what you command, Demora, as long as you make good," Nick declared, with a warmth that met the approval of all.

They gathered nearer and shook hands with him, one after the other, and Demora cried heartily:

"To the search, then, after which we'll return to our quarters and discuss the fate of the jade and our work for the future."

"That's agreeable to me," Nick declared promptly.

"You shall go with us, Sacco, for I've a fancy to make you one of our secret order. We'll see about that later. This search must be made, first of all."

"It will be useless, Demora, unless your eyes are sharper than mine," said Nick, with a doubtful headshake. "I've looked high and low, but maybe you will find it."

"I'll find it if it's in the house," Demora declared, with vicious vehemence.

"Let me carry the candle and light the way," Nick suggested, as if eager to begin serving the rascals.

And Tony Demora returned both the candle and the paper to the detective, who received them with a face as void of guile as the head of a barrel.

It is needless to say, of course, that the search made by the rascals proved to be a vain one. They left no corner unexamined, nor anything unturned, however, and only once during their labors did Nick feel any misgivings.

That was in the cellar, when he saw Russo glance at the particles of sand on the floor. But the evil-eyed knave appeared to think nothing about them, and Nick's apprehension was of brief duration.

More than an hour had passed when they trooped out of the house, the crafty detective pretending to be as disappointed as the others, and as vengefully disposed toward Marcia Canole.

Nick was the last to emerge from the house, however, and he blew out the candle and tossed it among the rank grass near the porch door—but not the paper rolled around it.

He deftly slipped that from the end of it and thrust it into his pocket.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE TOILS.

In the gloom of a rear basement in a house in one of the lower streets of Jersey City, a locality infested with criminals of nearly every character; a neighborhood in which men carried their lives in their hands—in the gloom of this rear basement, in a house that was dark from roof to cellar and otherwise deserted, a woman sat bound to a chair with stout cords, and her voice silenced with a gag that threatened life itself.

The woman was Marcia Canole.

To state precisely how she came there, the motives by which she lately had been actuated, the fatal steps that had led to the murder of her only assistant, the incentive to her cautious midnight visit to Hobart's rooms, her flight thence, stealthily tracked by the knaves into whose hands she since had fallen; the minor features of her seizure and removal to her present quarters—to cover this ground in detail would be only to enlarge upon the discoveries and deductions already made and set forth by Nick Carter, and to present an entirely unwarrantable rehearsal.

It was approaching nine o'clock that night when Nick, arm in arm with Tony Demora, and with Nicoli and Russo at their heels, arrived at this house and mounted the narrow stone steps leading to the dingy front door.

Demora opened it with a key and led Nick into the gloom of a narrow entry, closely followed by the others.

"Stand quiet," he muttered. "I'll quickly strike a light, Sacco."

There was no sign of a light, however, until after the door had been closed and locked, then further secured with a stout wooden bar.

The four figures had vanished quickly from the dismal, ill-lighted street, nearly as quickly as if the earth had opened and swallowed them.

Not so quickly, however, that two pairs of sharp eyes had failed to see where they went—the watchful eyes of Chick Carter and Patsy.

Both detectives had been on Nick's trail from the time he left home, constantly in the background, yet ready to instantly lend him a hand, if needed; and the four men no sooner had entered the house than both detectives were scurrying cautiously in search of a way to reach the back of it.

Demora struck a match and lighted a small oil lamp on a stand near the door. It revealed a dingy entry, with faded walls and bare floor, and he led the way through it and into an equally uninviting back room.

Though both Demora and Nicoli now were convinced that the detective was all that he had stated, there was a distrustful gleam lurking in the eyes of their confederate, Russo, which Nick Carter had not yet detected.

The room into which they had entered was cheaply furnished, evidently used for a dining room, when for legitimate purposes. A dumbwaiter was in one of the walls, at the door of which Demora turned to listen briefly, a move that convinced Nick that the woman he sought was in the room below.

While Demora stood there, Russo also pretended he wanted to listen, and thus contrived to have a stealthy word with the other.

"I want to speak to you alone, Tony," he whispered, significantly touching the latter's arm.

"What about?" asked Demora, glancing at him.

"I'll tell you, Tony. Give out that you're going down to see if she's there all right, and tell me to come with you."

Demora nodded. The import of what he heard was not to be ignored. He turned to Nicoli and said:

"Get out the bottle and some glasses, Philip. We'll drink the health of our new friend, Pasquale Sacco."

"Well said, Tony," cried Nicoli, hastening to obey.

"Meantime, I'll step down and see if the she-devil still is alive," Demora added. "She must be, for she has as many lives as a cat and can't have lost all of them. Get a lamp from the cupboard, Russo, and come along with me."

The latter at once complied, lighting a second lamp, and the two rascals presently withdrew from the room and closed the door.

"H'm, I don't half like that," thought Nick, at once suspicious. "It's ten to one that evil-eyed scamp gave him some kind of a warning when he got next at that hole in the wall. If I find that he suspects me, I must make a move to clinch Demora's good opinion. He plainly is the boss of the rascally bunch."

Though he felt sure he could successfully hold them up then and there, Nick was not inclined to do so just then. While he knew he had enough evidence to convict Demora of the murder of Felicia Loti, he wanted to learn just how the crime had been committed.

Demora halted. "will be all rs leading to the basement and turned to his companion.

"Well, what do you say, Domenico?" he asked, sharply eying him.

"It's about him," replied Russo, with a jerk of his thumb toward the back room.

"What about him?"

"Are you dead sure of him, Tony? Ain't this taking too long, chances?"

"Bah!" Demora ejaculated. "Chances of what? Explain."

"You know who's on this case, Tony, and mebbe on our track by this time," Russo sullenly rejoined. "He's tricky, this Nick Carter. I know more about him than you, for I've lived longer in this country. He carries things up his sleeve that we'd never dream of."

"But that fellow can't be Nick Carter," Demora forcibly protested. "How could Carter have learned about that cat down below, and the paper she got away with? Only Borgia and we knew of that. It must have been Borgia who told him."

"Would he squeal to the detective?"

"Borgia squeal?" sneered Demora scornfully. "A Barbonari squeal? You talk like one big fool. I'll hear no more of it."

"Hold on," Russo insisted. "Try him, Tony, at least."

"How try him?" Demora asked curiously.

"By some test that will make us sure of him."

"I can do that."

"Do it, then. It'll be safer, Tony."

"Leave it to me," Demora growled more darkly. "I'll find out if he means what he says."

"In what way, Tony?"

"You'll soon see, Domenico. I've thought of a way already. You'll soon see."

With the last words Demora signed for him to lead the way back into the room, where they found Nicoli and the detective seated with the bottle and glasses between them.

"Come, come, you two, we're waiting," cried Nicoli. "Anything wrong down there?"

"No, nothing wrong there," Demora answered, with a sharper glance at Nick. "Fill up the glasses, Nicoli."

The latter needed no second bidding. He poured a rousing bumper for all, and Nick Carter clinked his glass with each of the others and drained it without a grimace.

"Now," cried Demora, throwing himself into a chair opposite the detective, "we'll talk about our business. I reckon you know, Pasquale Sacco, why we have brought you here."

"I can guess," Nick grimly nodded. "But I'll know better, Demora, if you tell me plainly."

"You wish to cast your lot with ours, you said."

"So I say again, then," Nick declared.

"But we want only men of nerve and courage."

"I have both."

"Enough to do what we want done?"

"Try me and see."

"I am going to do so."

"The sooner, Demora, the better."

The Italian lurched forward in his chair, with a sinister gleam in his evil black eyes. Nick readily saw what this beginning signified. He knew that a feeling of distrust had come over the rascal, and that his veracity was to be tested in some knavish way. Nick was prepared for it, however, ready to offset their misgivings by still another crafty move, or to take them at a disadvantage at some opportune moment and bring the affair to a sudden satisfactory climax.

"What is it you want done, Demora?" he asked, with an air of grim indifference.

"We want the paper Marcia Canole has hidden in some place," Demora darkly answered, with unmistakable significance.

"You have her in this house, you said."

"That is true."

"Why don't you force her to tell you?" Nick demanded, with a growl, plainly seeing that this was at what the rascal was driving.

"That is easier said than done, Sacco."

"You have tried it, eh?"

"Yes."

Nick laughed scornfully, shrugging his broad shoul-

ders and shaking his head. Then, as if under a sudden impulse, he took the revolver from his side pocket and thrust it across the table around which the gang was seated.

"I told you I had a gun with me, Demora, one I had brought specially for the infernal cat," he declared, with a threatening snarl. "Try forcing her with that, Demora. If she don't give in, let her have one of the bullets. That will put her out of your way, at least. I told you I'd brought a gun for her."

Nick made it a point, however, to say nothing about another, then in his hip pocket. As he anticipated, this voluntary surrender of his weapon not only again dispelled Demora's misgivings, but also led all hands to infer that he did not have another.

Though a look of satisfaction crossed Demora's swarthy face, he quickly shook his head and answered:

"That sounds all right, Sacco, but it won't work."

"Won't work?" queried Nick, as if he did not understand.

"She does not fear death."

"Doesn't, eh?"

"No. To kill her before we recover the paper will not do. We must try other means."

"What other, Demora?"

"Torture," said Demora, bending still nearer.

Nick drew back a little, as if he did not fancy the project.

"Torture, eh?" he growled, with brows knitting.

"Nothing else will serve—and possibly that will not. But it must be tried."

"Try it, then. Who's to prevent?"

"The question is not who will prevent, but who will do it," Demora said sternly. "We will see if you have nerve to do what we require. Torture only will loosen the woman's tongue. It is up to you, Sacco, to inflict it."

"That's how you'll try me, is it?" Nick snarled, a bit resentfully.

"Yes. What do you say?"

"I say what I said before," Nick cried abruptly, as if piqued by the other's sinister sneer. "I say again—try me and see!"

CHAPTER [illegible]

HOW NICK MADE GOOD.

The declaration of Nick Carter, made with sudden threatening vehemence, was not without effect upon his hearers. They seemed to no longer doubt that he meant what he said.

Nick noticed, nevertheless, as all three ruffians sprang to their feet, that Russo quickly reached for the revolver still lying on the table, and retained it in his hand.

"That infernal scoundrel still is suspicious," thought Nick. "I'll give it to him good and strong a little later to pay for it."

It was obvious that the rascals meant to lose no time in executing their infamous project. Demora took one of the lamps, signing for Nicoli to bring the other, at the same time crying harshly:

"This way, Sacco. Come with us and we'll show you where she is and what must be done."

"I'm ready for it," growled Nick, rising to comply.

Demora led the way, the detective following, and the others bringing up the rear.

Down a narrow back flight of stairs and into the rear basement room, the door of which Demora unlocked with a key taken from his pocket, Nick was grimly conducted.

His first glance was not at the woman bound in a chair in one corner, already tortured beyond ordinary endurance, but around the dismal room. Nick saw at once that it was on the ground floor, a basement kitchen, and that the two windows must open into a rear yard. A soiled curtain hung at each of them, however, so closely drawn as to prevent any view from out of doors.

Nick was thinking at that moment of Chick and Patsy, and wondering near what part of the house they were located. The mental query hardly had crossed his mind, however, before it was artfully answered.

From some quarter outside, so far removed that it occasioned no suspicion, came a catcall that ended in a low, sullen snarl, then died away to silence.

"H'm! on hand, eh?" thought Nick grimly. "I

guess things now will be all right. I'll call the turn on these rascals in short order."

Demora had placed both of the lamps on a wooden mantel, above a rusty stove at one side of the room. In the middle of it was a square kitchen table, covered with a faded red cloth. As Nick turned to see what they were about, each of the three ruffians drew a chair to one side of the table, in such a position that all could face the woman, and each laid a revolver on the table directly in front of him.

"They don't mean to be caught napping, in case I kick against the game," Nick said to himself. "It don't look so easy, after all, to get those guns out of their reach and bring my own into play. I reckon I can make good, however."

He had turned and stood grimly gazing at Marcia Canole while these thoughts passed through his mind. One look at her ghastly face, handsome even in its haggard and drawn condition, was enough to cause Nick to insure her release at the earliest possible moment.

There was a look of despair in her splendid dark eyes, but no sign of fear. She was eminently worthy of the vocation in which she figured.

Demora, quite unconsciously, put Nick in the way to speedily accomplish his object.

"Take out that gag, Sacco," he commanded, with an ugly ring in his hard voice. "Take it out, and we'll see what she now has to say."

Nick fished out his knife and cut the string that held the infernal device in place.

Marcia caught her breath with a gasp, and a look of relief rose to her pale face. She gazed up at Nick, wondering who this addition to her foes might be; but he did not dare give her an encouraging look, even. He stood grimly awaiting Demora's next command.

Before it was uttered, the scowling rascal questioned the woman in his curtly sinister fashion.

"Got anything to say?" he asked.

Marcia looked at him scornfully and shook her head.

"No more than I already have said, Antonio Demora," she answered, in dry and husky tones. "You know what that is."

"You'd better think it over."

"I have done so."

"And still refuse to tell us where the paper is concealed?"

"I shall reveal nothing."

A fiery gleam leaped up in Demora's black eyes. He glanced sharply at Nick, crying sternly:

"Throttle her, Sacco! Strangle her until she confesses!"

"That's right," put in Nicoli, with a wolfish snarl. "Choke her till she consents to speak."

Nick Carter drew back a little, scowling darkly. He hesitated only to form some plan of action that would serve his purpose, but looked as if he shrank from the hideous undertaking.

"Why do you wait?" snapped Demora.

"Shall I do it with my hands?" growled Nick resentfully.

"With your hands—yes!" cried Demora. "What else can you use?"

"I'll not do it with my hands," Nick snarled; then quickly added, as Demora glanced at his weapon: "Stop a bit, mates! I have it, and will do it. But I'll do it with one of these."

He turned while speaking and quickly cut away one of the window cords.

As he did so, he thrust one hand back of the curtain with a lightning-like move and unfastened the window.

"I'll do it with this, Demora," he cried, striding nearer the table and waving the strip of cord. "I'll not touch her infernal throat with my hands, but I'll do it with this."

His glaring eyes, his hoarse, excited voice, his threatening aspect, all indicated that he meant what he said.

The woman in the chair was as ghastly white as if the hand of death already had been laid upon her.

"That will do as well," cried Demora, with countenance as black as midnight. "Get at it, Sacco, get at it. Let the work begin."

"I'll do so, Demora," cried Nick; and he did.

He had let one hand drop to the edge of the table while speaking. It closed now on the red cloth with which it was covered. With a backward jerk, he

yanked the cloth and the three revolvers lying on it toward him, and cast them all on the floor.

It was done in an instant.

In another instant his own revolver was out and covering the startled knaves, too surprised to make a move in self-protection.

"Sit quiet!" Nick thundered, in his own ringing tones. "I'll send a bullet through the heart of the first who stirs. Your game is up, you curs, and you now must take your medicine."

"Heavens, Sacco, what do you——" Demora began, with a gasp.

"Sacco be hanged," Nick sternly interrupted. "I'm not the man you think, but the man you fear. I'm Nick Carter, the detective."

The astounded ruffians stared like men suddenly tongue-tied.

From Marcia Canole, however, there came a low, glad cry of relief.

It was partly drowned by the shrill whistle that came from Nick at that moment. It had hardly been uttered, moreover, before the window was thrown open and Chick and Patsy came plunging into the room.

"Right here, chief!" yelled Patsy triumphantly. "You've called the turn, all right, and we're here at the finish. Gee! but this is a walkover."

"Put irons on these fellows, then, and that will be the finish, as far as our work is concerned," laughed Nick, seeing that Chick now had the knaves covered. "In the meantime, Miss Canole, I'll release you from these distressing bonds. How very lucky I was able to find you."

A flood of color had risen over Marcia's handsome face and tears were glistening in her eyes. She looked at Nick in a way he never forgot, saying in choked tones:

"Oh, Mr. Carter, how am I to repay you—how am I to repay you?"

"The boot's on the other leg," laughed Nick, much pleased. "Don't forget how you served me in like fashion a week ago. We now are quits, and these rascals are in custody."

In less than half an hour, too, the three knaves were on their way to the local police station, in the care of as many officers, for whom Nick had sent Patsy, his design being to have the prisoners brought to New York the following day. That their punishment was insured, their conviction being inevitable under the evidence now in his possession, Nick Carter had not a doubt.

The story told a little later by Marcia Canole, whose gratitude for Nick scarce knew bounds, confirmed all of the great detective's deductions, and the case then had to rest until the trial of the crooks, the result of which already was assured.

Nick invited the handsome Secret Service girl to his residence that night, an invitation that Marcia gladly accepted, and there Nick heard her story and told his own, afterward restoring to her the important document taken from the cellar of her temporary and, as it proved, futile refuge. The surprise of the girl, upon learning that Nick had found the paper and how he had fooled the Barbonari, was very amusing to the detective.

"Dear me, Mr. Carter," Marcia blushingly declared; "I doubt if you have a peer in this business. I wish we had a few men like you in our own Secret Service."

"Well," smiled Nick, bowing his thanks, "your service has, at least, one very clever and courageous woman. One, too, whom I am proud to number among my friends."

It was not without a feeling of regret, in fact, that Nick bade her adieu the following day. Yet he somehow felt, as he had felt a week before when parting from her, that he had not seen the last of her.

THE END.

The Barbonari are in the "cooler," but that does not make a detective like Nick Carter think that the world is wholly rid of their knavish work. He keeps an eye on the gang, all the same, and well that he does so. The reason for this is set forth in the next number (685), in a story that tops anything we've had yet about the Barbonari. "The Crimson Flash; or, Nick Carter's Harlem River Mystery," is the title of this amazing tale. Keep your eye peeled for it; you'd regret letting it get by you. No. 685.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, February 5, 1910.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(*Postage Free.*)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

ORMOND G. SMITH, GEORGE C. SMITH, *Proprietors.*

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

CAUGHT AT LAST.

AMONG the wild hills of South America near the Chilian coast, with an old rusty knapsack on his back and a stout staff, his only weapon, in his hand, journeyed Walter Clauson, a young sailor, a first mate, bound to Valparaiso, there to meet his young wife Bella, to whom he had been recently married.

He had been to San Carlos on an errand for the owners of his vessel, in a schooner, which, however, having been wrecked off the coast, he had, after succeeding in accomplishing his mission, started to return on foot.

Miles and miles he had traveled, cheered on by the thought of one who was dearer to him than all the world.

Some of the San Carlos Chilians had solemnly shaken their heads when to them he stated his purpose of journeying on foot, declaring that he would never reach his destination alive. Either robbers or wild beasts would put an end to him ere he could get to Valparaiso.

He kept on, however, with a brave heart and limbs which had ever been almost strangers to fatigue, purchasing with a few reals in his pocket food now and then from the inmates of some hut or other habitation on the way.

One day, however, he lost the road he had been pursuing. He searched for it vainly all day long, and, as night came upon him, he found himself in the heart of a deep, dense forest.

All was darkness here.

The wind, with a howl and a shriek, made weird music among the tall trees, which swayed creaking at every blast.

Tired and sad, the young man sat down beneath a tree.

Gradually the wind died away, enabling him the better to hear the strange noises freeing the forest among them—the screaming of the wild cats and the howling of the ferocious cougar.

Should any of those beasts attack him, it must fare hard with him, provided only with a staff.

Finally feeling sleepy, he crawled into the branches of a spreading tree, and, selecting a good place for a couch, lay down and dropped into a heavy slumber.

He dreamed he saw an Indian woman stealing toward him, evidently with hostile intent, as her hand rested upon the hilt of a knife in her belt, and her eyes glared upon him like those of a wild cat.

Nearer and nearer she drew every moment. Finally, just as she was about raising her knife to deal the fatal blow, he waked with a start, which would have thrown him off the tree had he not clutched one of the branches.

He swung himself back to his position. As he did so a groan like a human sigh fell upon his ear. It seemed to come from behind him. He turned, but could see no person.

"Strange!" he murmured. "What can be the matter with me?"

The moon was now shining brightly, throwing floods of silver light down through an opening above his head, enabling him to see objects several yards distant.

Nothing, however, caught his gaze as he looked about him except the limbs, branches, and leaves of trees.

He was about composing himself to sleep again, feeling that he needed rest after his late hardships, when again he heard that sigh.

This time it seemed to come from over his head. He looked up, but at first could see nothing. The next moment, however, he beheld two flaming balls of light gleaming down at him from a distance of about a yard above.

Watching those glancing balls of light, he suddenly noticed the square head and short ears of some animal revealed for an instant as it was turned so that it caught the gleam of the moonlight.

"A wild beast!" he muttered, firmly grasping his staff, which he had placed between two knotted branches. "If the creature attacks me it will certainly fare hard with me, poorly armed as I am."

At that instant the animal uttered a yell such as Walter had never before heard and never hoped to hear again.

Then its form clove the air with rushing sound, and in a moment more it was upon the branch nearest the young man's head. There it stood glaring at him and gnashing its teeth, its mane and tail bristling angrily.

Evidently it was very hungry and wanted to make a meal of him.

A few minutes it remained glaring at him, then sprang upon him with a terrible snarl.

Walter, prepared for it, thrust his only weapon, the stick, straight down the creature's throat, and proceeded to ram it still farther down, when the enraged beast caught it between its teeth, and, with a movement as powerful as it was sudden, jerked the staff from his grasp.

"Heaven help me now!" was the young sailor's mental exclamation. "Good-by, Bella; I shall never see you again!"

Far away from it, with one jerk of its head, the animal hurled the staff, then it pounced upon him.

It caught him by the arm with its teeth as he held up the limb to parry its attack.

Then he felt the sharp fangs sinking into his flesh.

With all his might he drew off, dealing the beast a furious kick in the stomach.

For a moment the creature released its hold of him. Then, quick as lightning, having made up his mind, he dropped from the branch to the ground, a distance of about ten feet.

The soil beneath him was marshy. He sank to his hips.

With another yell, down came the cougar, landing at his side as he dodged it. Down it went, up to its haunches, in the soft ground.

It must soon, however, free itself, a fact which at once occurred to Walter.

Quick at conceiving new ideas in moments of peril, from his remarkable self-possession on such occasions, Walter hit upon a plan, which, while attended apparently with great danger to himself, seemed about the only one he could adopt under the circumstances.

This was to throw himself at once upon the cougar's back, pressing upon it with all his might and thus sinking it beneath the marshy ground.

Whether he could keep it there long enough to smother the ferocious creature remained to be seen.

He threw himself upon the animal, pressing as intimated. It went under, but the next moment up came its head, the ugly jaws snapping at its adversary.

At this Walter, heedless of the long teeth, pressed his whole weight upon the animal's head.

The sharp fangs sank slantingly into the flesh of his bosom; he was covered with blood, but undauntedly he persevered.

Thus he finally got the head of the cougar under and kept it so, nearly motionless by exerting all the strength of which he was master.

This strength, unfortunately, could not long be exerted. The young man was soon thrown almost bodily upward by the powerful efforts of the animal to free itself.

He strained every muscle, but in vain. The animal finally got up its head; then, rearing backward, escaped him.

Now, with its feet still in the marshy ground, it turned, glaring, upon him, preparatory to renewing the combat.

A feeling almost of despair came over him.

"If I only had a knife!—a knife!" he thought, clinching his teeth.

The sight of his clothing, his hair, and his face covered with blood, seemed to enrage the creature to the fury of a demon.

It lashed its tail again and again, and bellowed like a bull, while its round eyes, encircled with white rings, seemed to roll in its head.

Walter, as mentioned, now nearly despaired. He looked about him vainly for some mode of ridding himself of his tormenter.

Finally he caught sight of the roots of the tree near which he stood and beneath which he noticed that the ground had caved in, leaving a hollow plenty large enough to contain a human being.

Into this hollow he crawled instinctively. The cougar also worked its way toward the spot, but Walter had now pulled the yielding, supple roots down so that they formed a sort of cage about his person.

The cougar, with teeth and claws, endeavored to tear those roots asunder, but they were so tough and stringy that it seemed plain they would resist its efforts for a long time.

Finally, by dint of biting away the small network of roots, the cougar succeeded in getting its head into the hollow.

This was what Walter had, for some time, been expecting, what he had hoped for and been prepared for.

Quick as lightning he twisted one of the long, slender roots about the animal's neck, and commenced twisting it tighter and tighter.

The animal made furious efforts to get away, but Walter, struggling for his life, was now more than a match for it. Tighter and tighter he twisted the root.

The red eyeballs of the savage beast protruded from its head; its tongue hung from its mouth; it writhed, twisted, and snarled in agony.

Still the young man persevered. The motions of the animal became fainter; it fell over upon its side; its eyes rolled wildly in its head; a green and white froth came out upon its mouth and nostrils.

Walter kept twisting the roots until he was sure he had strangled the creature to death, when, climbing back into the tree, he thanked God for his narrow escape.

In the morning he continued his journey, and, before noon, by making inquiries of the native Chilians, he found the road he had lost.

He stopped at a hut until sufficiently recovered from his wounds to keep on, when he started off again on foot.

At last, after several hairbreadth escapes from wandering Indians, he arrived at Valparaiso, where he found his young wife anxiously waiting for him and glad enough to see him again.

Years have passed since then, during which he has met with many hazardous adventures. Of none, however, does he ever speak so impressively as of his encounter on that night in the woods with the ferocious cougar.

THE DESERTERS.

FOUR sailors deserted the ship *St. Mary* shortly after her arrival at the port of San Carlos. Three of the runaways being desperate characters, who had more than once threatened to murder the captain and take the ship, no effort was made to recapture them.

"We'll let 'em go," the young skipper had said to his mate. "That is my wife's advice. She tells me that she could not help feeling uneasy while those ruffians were on board."

"Ay, ay, it's best to let 'em go," answered the first officer. "I don't believe there's a more ruffianly set to be found than three of 'em—Tom Gray, Bill Spoke, and Ned Warren. As to the other, Harry Smith, he isn't such a bad fellow, but as long as he joined the rest we'll not bother with him, either."

One night, not long after the desertion, the captain and his pretty wife, Mary, having been pulled ashore in the quarter-boat, were strolling arm in arm along one of the roads outside of the town, when they were suddenly surrounded by four men. The young skipper quickly pulled his sheath knife from his belt, but, before he could use it, he received a heavy blow upon the head from some person behind him, and fell senseless at the feet of his young bride.

"Ho! ho!" cried the voice of Tom Gray; "I guess you got it then, youngster. That's the way to do the business. I never dealt a better blow in my life. One of you'd better make sure of him, however, while I attend to the young lady."

Accordingly Harry Smith advanced, flourishing his knife in a threatening manner, and he laughed disdainfully when Mary, who was now kneeling by the prostrate form, tried to push him back with her tiny hands, while entreating him to spare the life of her husband.

Her voice was soon hushed by Spoke, who suddenly thrust a gag into her mouth. Then he pulled her away from her husband, and, throwing both arms around her waist, held her with a firm grasp.

"Don't struggle—it's no use of struggling!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't let you go, I wouldn't, not for a fortune. That gag will prevent you from cryin' out and splittin' a blood vessel, which would be a great misfortun' to us as have had so much trouble in getting you."

The young bride did not hear a word of this speech. All her attention was absorbed by the movements of Smith, who, now stooping over the motionless form of the captain, lifted his knife on high, with the point directed at the heart of the helpless man. She clasped her hands in agony; her eyes flashed wildly with the supplication her lips could no longer utter; a deathlike pallor overspread her face.

Still holding the knife uplifted, the deserter looked at her steadily for a few seconds; she thought she could detect a gleam of mercy in his eyes; she thought she even saw the hand that grasped the weapon shake with a sudden tremor.

Perhaps she was deceived; she might be, for the darkness prevented her from seeing very distinctly, but, at any rate, a faint hope glided into her bosom. The next moment, however, it vanished; for, with a mocking laugh, Smith again fixed his glance upon the prostrate form, then—the glittering steel descended!

"Ho! ho! that was too much for her!" cried Tom. "She's gone off in a swoon! Where did you stick him, my lad? It's so confounded dark I couldn't see!"

"In the heart!" answered Smith. "He's as dead as a frozen fish! The blow was strong and sure!"

He rolled the motionless body over upon its face, and proceeded to wash his knife in a puddle of water.

"Push the corpse into the brush!" exclaimed Tom; "we don't want to be bothered with it."

"No, no!" replied the other, "if you'll take my advice, we'll bury it. I never could bear the sight of a dead man's face. We'll probably see the body again if we throw it in the brush."

"That conscience of yours, Harry, will yet be the death of you!" cried Tom. "However, we'll bury it, if you'll take the trouble to dig the grave. I shan't bother about it, for my part."

So saying, he hurried off with his unconscious burden, followed by Spoke and Warren, leaving Harry Smith to dispose of the body of the young captain.

They soon reached a hut in a deep valley, between a range of lofty hills, and, taking the gag from the mouth of the unconscious girl, they thrust her into the rude habitation. Then Tom Gray pulled an old notebook from his pocket and tore out a page.

"What are you going to do now?" inquired one of his companions.

"Cast lots for the gal," replied Tom. "We've got her, it's true, but we're still to determinate who's to have the little treasure, d'ye see."

"Ay, ay," responded the other, "but there can be no fair casting of lots in the dark. We must have light on the question."

"It isn't necessary, Ned," replied Gray; "we can tell by the feel of the slip who draws."

"No, no, none of that!" interrupted Warren fiercely. "It must be done fair and square, or, blow me, if I don't take possession of the lass myself."

The speaker was a man of gigantic frame, and evidently not to be trifled with. He drew his knife, and his eyes glared.

"It's all right," said Gray, sullenly. "We'll build a fire, and then we can have plenty of light. I don't care to fight about the girl; not that I fear death, though, for——"

"Oh, no, of course not!" interrupted Warren, with a rough laugh. "I notice there's no danger of your ever dyin'! You'll always contrive to put that off as long as you can."

"You may think so if you like," answered Gray, "but there's certain laws of life and death which such as you knows nothing about. The first of these laws is self-preservation."

"And with that law you're mightily well acquainted," responded Warren. "Blow me if I think there's anybody better acquainted with it."

"Thank you," answered Gray, "you won't pick a quarrel with me to-night; I'm not in a fighting mood. Unless my anger is up to the boilin' point, I never engage in a fray."

The lip of the giant curled, and he thrust his knife into his belt.

"I'm not particularly anxious to be a-sheddin' the blood of a fox," he muttered, "so let that end the matter."

Gray made no reply, but proceeded to gather the sticks for a fire. Assisted by his two companions, a merry blaze was soon leaping up from a spot near the right bank of the lake.

"It's most time Smith was here," said Spoke, as the slips for drawing were being prepared.

"Oh, he'll be a long time digging the grave for the carcass. He's one of them kind that pretends to be chivalrous. He thinks he won't have anything to do with injuring that young widow. Blast it! what have we to do with chivalry, especially here. We should pocket our chivalry, under present circumstances."

"That's so!" said Spoke. "There's no use of——"

He was interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps, and the three barely had time to spring to their feet, ere the crew of the quarter-boat, headed by the captain himself, rushed toward them.

"What does this mean?" yelled Gray, staring aghast at the young skipper. "Here's the very man that Smith stabbed to the heart."

"It does seem like a wonderful mystery!" cried the giant Warren, drawing his knife; "but, blast me, if I'll be taken without some desp'rit fighting, mystery or no mystery."

Even as he spoke, however, he received a blow from the butt of a pistol in the hands of one of the boat's crew, and the next moment the three ruffians were lying helpless upon the ground, their wrists and ankles fettered with strong cords.

"Now, then, speak!" cried the captain fiercely; "speak at once and tell me what you have done with my wife."

"As we ain't in a situation to help ourselves," answered Spoke, "we may as well tell you. She's in the hut."

A joyful cry was heard at that moment, and a second after the young wife who had by this time recovered her senses, was in the arms of her husband.

"Thank Heaven, you are saved!" he cried, covering her face with kisses—"rescued from the hands of these ruffians."

"Yes," she replied, "and you, too, though I'm sure I thought I saw Harry Smith plunge the knife into your heart."

"He only pretended to do so," answered the skipper, "in order to save me. In reality, he merely ran the knife through my jacket. Afterward he restored me to my senses, assisted me to hunt up my boat's crew, and, when they had been found, guided us to this rendezvous."

"Betrayed!" cried the giant Warren—"the rascal betrayed us."

"Ay, ay!" cried Smith, now coming forward. "I know I did. When I joined you I did not dream that you intended to commit murder and insult defenseless women. Had I known that you should never have persuaded me to leave the ship with you."

We have only to add that the three ruffians were conducted to the calaboose, and set to work with the "chain gang," and that the captain, with his boat's crew, his lovely wife, and Harry Smith, returned to the ship.

A RACE WITH WINTER.

WITH provisions for only ten days, a party of explorers in Alaska found, in September, that they must build rafts and take their chances of letting the swift river carry them to settlements where food could be obtained. Otherwise ice and snow would shut them in from all hope of rescue.

Of this journey on the roughly made rafts Mr. Robert Dunn tells in "The Shameless Diary of an Explorer."

"At eleven o'clock began the most thrilling sport I know, rafting down the snaky cañons of an unmapped glacial river.

"Fred and I captained the *Mary Ann II*, the other three the *Eskel May*. We rasped and hauled them over the gravel shallows of our tributary, shot out between the main walls of the stream, and seized upon that boiling current.

"We reached silently from cliff to cliff, jammed pike-poles into the slate shelf overhead, twirled out of eddies. We bumped and grounded. We dashed overboard, and on the run eased her across shallows. We tugged half an hour to make an inch at each shove through the gravel, suddenly plunged in to our necks, and she leaped free as we scrambled on.

"Bowlders rose through white ruffs of water in mid-channel. We might, or might not, hang on them for a perpendicular minute.

"You must be very handy with a pole. You must have a hair-fine eye for moving angles, the strength of an eddy, the depth of foam ruffling over a stump. You must be surer of the length of your pole than a polo player of the reach of his mallet. You must be quicker than a Siwash dog. You must know the different weight of each log down to ounces, the balance of the duffel piled high like a dais covered with the tent and the bean pot, the mackinaws and the axe lashed to all the lashings. It's a pretty game."

TRAPPED THE OFFICE BOY.

Employer: "How is it you get back so late from your grandmother's funeral?"

Office Boy: "It is a ten-innings match, sir."

LATEST ISSUES

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The most original stories of Western adventure. The only weekly containing the adventures of the famous Buffalo Bill. High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.

444—Buffalo Bill's Comrades; or, Breaking the "Ring" that Robbed the Indians.
445—Buffalo Bill in the Bad Lands; or, A Brave Attempt to Prevent a War.
446—Buffalo Bill and the Boy Bugler; or, The Mysterious Girl of Sacred Mountain.
447—Buffalo Bill and the Heathen Chinee; or, The Missing Witness.
448—Buffalo Bill and the Chink War; or, Playing with Fire.
449—Buffalo Bill's Chinese Chase; or, The Battle of the Tongs.
450—Buffalo Bill's Secret Message; or, Professor Six and the Cipher.
451—Buffalo Bill and the Horde of Hermosa; or, The Red Rivals of the Rio Bravo.
452—Buffalo Bill's Lonesome Trail; or, Foiling the Red Invaders.
453—Buffalo Bill's Quarry; or, Captain Rance, of the Gold Seekers.
454—Buffalo Bill in Deadwood; or, The Trail of the Copperhead.
455—Buffalo Bill's First Aid; or, Saving the Shotgun Messenger.

BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY

All kinds of stories that boys like. The biggest and best nickel's worth ever offered. High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.

360—Yankee Grit; or, With Stanley in "Darkest Africa." By Harrie Irving Hancock.
361—The Tiger's Claws; or, Out with the Mad Mullah. By Weldon J. Cobb.
362—A Taxicab Tangle; or, The Mission of the Motor Boys. By Stanley R. Matthews.
363—A Hoodoo Machine; or, The Motor Boys' Runabout No. 1313. By the author of "A Taxicab Tangle."
364—Pluck Beats Luck; or, Tom Talbot's Trials and Triumphs. By John L. Douglas.
365—Two Young Adventurers; or, The Czar of Toddland. By Harrie Irving Hancock.
366—The Roustabout Boys; or, A Trip to Maine. By the Author of "Never Give Up."
367—Aboard the Lively Bee; or, An American Boy's Adventures in War. By John De Morgan.
368—Sparkling Plunder; or, Gordon Keith Bagging Jailbirds. By Lawrence White, Jr.
369—Under Full Steam; or, The Tugboat Route to Success. By John L. Douglas.
370—The Boys of Liberty; or, The Adventures of Paul Revere. By John De Morgan.
371—The House of Mystery; or, Working a Great Scheme. By Matt Royal.

TIP TOP WEEKLY

The most popular publication for boys. The adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell can be had only in this weekly. High art colored covers. Thirty-two pages. Price, 5 cents.

705—Dick Merriwell's Best Form; or, Master of Himself.
706—Dick Merriwell's Prank; or, The Exposure of Artie Ettinger.
707—Dick Merriwell's Gambol; or, Sport at the County Fair.
708—Dick Merriwell's Gun; or, The Mystery of the Covers.
709—Dick Merriwell at His Best; or, Rounding the Team Into Form.
710—Dick Merriwell's Master Mind; or, The Mysterious Mr. Snare.
711—Dick Merriwell's Dander; or, The Day of Reckoning.
712—Dick Merriwell's Hope; or, The Reliance of the Blue.
713—Dick Merriwell's Standard; or, Up to the Mark.
714—Dick Merriwell's Sympathy; or, Helping a Boy in Need.
715—Dick Merriwell in Lumber Land; or, The Men of the Big North Woods.
716—Frank Merriwell's Fairness; or, The Crime of a Nation.
717—Frank Merriwell's Pledge; or, The Slaves of Yucatan.
718—Frank Merriwell, the Man of Grit; or, The Peril of Barney Malloy.
719—Frank Merriwell's Return Blow; or, The Downfall of the Dictator.
720—Frank Merriwell's Quest; or, A Hard-won Victory.

For sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent to any address on receipt of price, 5 cents per copy, in money or postage stamps, by

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our Weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Fill out the following Order Blank and send it to us with the price of the Weeklies you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

.....190

STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs: Enclosed please find.....cents for which send me:

TIP TOP WEEKLY, Nos.....
NICK CARTER WEEKLY, " .....
DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY, " .....
BUFFALO BILL STORIES, Nos.....
BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY, " .....

Name.....Street.....City.....State.....

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

When it comes to detective stories worth while, the NICK CARTER WEEKLY contains the only ones that should be considered. They are not overdrawn tales of bloodshed. They rather show the workings of one of the finest minds ever conceived by a writer.

The name of Nick Carter is familiar all over the world and the stories of his adventures are read eagerly by millions, in twenty different languages. No other stories have withstood the severe test of time so well as those contained in the NICK CARTER WEEKLY. It proves conclusively that they are best.

We give herewith a list of all the back numbers in print. You can have your news-dealer order them or they will be sent direct by the publishers to any address upon receipt of the price in money or postage-stamps.

374—The Sign of the Dagger.
385—The Secret Order of Associated Crooks.
386—When the Vere Trumps.
387—The Gambler's Last Hand.
388—The Murder at Linden Hall.
389—Mercedes Danton's Double.
390—The Millionaire's Nemesis.
391—A Princess of the Underworld.
392—A Queen of Her Kind.
393—Isabel Benton's Trump Card.
401—The House with the Open Door.
402—The Society of the Scarlet Cross.
404—The Trail of the Vampire.
406—The Captain of the Vampire.
407—A Bank President's Plot.
409—The Carruthers Puzzle.
412—The Point of a Dagger.
423—The Conspiracy of an Empire.
424—A Queen of Vengeance.
432—Nick Carter's Convict Enemy.
433—The Pirate of the Sound.
434—The Cruise of the Shadow.
435—A Prince of Impostors.
437—Fighting a Death Trail.
438—The Crime of the Potomac.
439—In the Shadow of Death.
440—The Fear-Haunted Broker.
442—A Clever Grab.
443—The Mystery of the Front Room.
444—The Crime of Union Square.
445—A Millionaire's Double.
446—The Broadway Cross.
447—The Princess Dagmar.
448—The Quexel Tragedy.
450—Missing; in Sack of Gold.
451—The Secret Cathedral Mystery.
452—A Play for a Million.
453—The Stolen Diamonds.
455—Nick Carter's Human Weapon.
456—The Compact of Death.
457—The Rajah's Revenge.
458—A Tragedy of the Sea.
461—Nick Carter's Strange Power.
462—Nick Carter and the Marix-Satan.
463—The Millionaire Cracksman.
464—The Mystery Man.
465—Scylla the Sea Robber.
466—The Beautiful Pirate of Oyster Bay.
467—The Man from Nevada.
468—Maguey, the Mexican.
469—Pedro, the Dog Detective.
470—The Automobile Fiend.
471—Hands, the Left Hand.
472—The Black Hand's Nemesis.
473—An Expert in Craft.
474—Nick Carter's Terrible Experience.
475—The Mystery of an Untold Crime.
476—Diana, the Arch-demon.
478—A Wizard of the Highway.
479—Abducted in Broad Day.
480—Tong of the Ruthless Dragon.
481—The Padlocked Mystery.
482—Dema, the Dangerous.
483—Nick Carter's Murder Problem.
484—A Battle Among the Clouds.
485—The Veiled Princess.
486—The Conquest of a Kingdom.
487—The House of Skeletons.
488—A Queen of Inferno.
489—Nick Carter's Pygmy Adversary.
490—Three Times in Peril.
491—The Gold Lettered Dagger.
492—That Mysterious Affair.
493—A Dead Guardian of Millions.
494—The Mysterious Treasure Hunters.
495—The Maddike Bank Puzzle.
496—The "Bad Man" of Nome.
498—Following an Ocean Trail.
499—A Clue from the Clouds.
500—Praxatel, of the Ironarm.
502—Ismalia, the Chieftain.
503—Nick Carter's Earthquake Clue.
504—Nick Carter Among the Bad Men.
505—The Man of Many Faces.
506—A Letter from the Dead.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Burglar.
508—The "Skiddoo" of the K. U. & T.
509—The Giant of the Desert.
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery.
512—A Battle of Wits.
513—A Game of Pyx Millions.
514—Codman the Poisoner.
515—The Plot of the Prisoner.
516—The Mechanical Giant.
517—Doris, the Unknown.
518—A Japanese Woman.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost.
520—The Mystery of Misery.
521—The Mysterious Stranger.
522—The Countess Vera Woman.
523—The Man in the Doorway.
524—The Plot of the Baron.
525—The Detective on the Night Local.
526—A Double Mystery.
527—Clarice, the Countess.
528—Clarice, the Female Detective.
530—An Amazonian Queen.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror.
534—Mary, the Woman of Mystery.
535—The Making of a King.
536—The Empire of a Goddess.
537—Zanabayah, the Terrible.
538—The Seven-headed Monster.
539—The Woman of the Mask.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Deed.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double.
546—Three Against Fifteen.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast.
549—The House of Secrets.
550—The Bank President.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot.
552—The Pare-dise Mystery.
553—A Mystery from the Klondyke
554—Returned from the Grave.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch.
556—A Bad Man of Montana.
557—The Man from Arizona.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand.
559—A Beautiful Anarchist.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move.
561—The Brotherhood of Free Russia.
562—A White House Mystery.
563—The Great Spy System.
564—The Last of Mustushibni.
565—The Mystery of a Haunted House.
566—A Mystery in India Ink.
567—The Plot of the Stantons.
568—The Criminal Trust.
569—The Syndicate of Crooks.
570—The Order of the Python.
571—Tried for His Life.
572—A Man with a Thief.
573—Peters, the Shrewd Crook.
574—The Mystery of the Empty Grave.
575—The Yellow Beryl.
576—The Dead Man on the Roof.
577—A Double-barreled Puzzle.
578—The Princess Dorn.
579—Jasper Ryan's Counter Move.
580—An International Conspiracy.
581—Pitted Against a Nation.
582—Mignon Dupree, the Female Spy
583—A Mystery of High Society.
584—A Million Dollars Reward.
585—The Signal of Seven Shots.
586—The "Shadow."
587—A Dead Man's Secret.
588—A Victim of Magic.
589—A Plot Within a Palace.
590—The Countess Vera's Defense.
591—The Princess' Last Effort.
592—The Two Lost Chittendens.
593—Pearl, the Avenger.
594—Eulalia, the Bandit Queen.
595—The Carpet's Mystery.
596—A Battle of Wit and Skill.
597—Vanderdyken, the Millionaire
598—Peters's Vacation Problem.
599—The King's Prisoner.
600—A Woman to the Rescue.
601—Nick Carter in Japan.
602—Thelka, the Geisha Girl.
603—By Order of the Emperor.
604—The Convict's Secret.
605—The Man in the Dark.
606—An Anarchist Plot.
607—The Mysterious Mr. Peters.
608—A Woman at Bay.
609—The Unknown Tragedy.
610—Nick Carter's Strangest Case.
611—The Stolen Treasure.
612—The Island of Fire.
613—The Senator's Plot.
614—The Madness of Morgan.
615—A Million-dollar Hold-up.
616—Nick Carter's Submarine Clue.
617—Under the Flag of Chance.
618—The Case Against Judge Bernard.
619—Down to the Grave.
620—The Fatal Engagement.
621—The Ghost of Nick Carter.
622—A Strange Coincidence.
623—Pauline—A Mystery.
624—A Woman of Plots.
625—A Millionaire Swindler.
626—The Money Schemers.
627—On the Trail of the Moon.
628—The House of Mystery.
629—The Disappearance of Monsieur Lenaux.
630—An Heiress to Millions.
631—The Man in the Biograph.
632—The Time-lock Puzzle.
633—The Moving Picture Mystery.
634—The Doctor's Peril.
635—A Strange Bargain.
636—The Haunted Circus.
637—The Secret of a Private Room.
638—A Mental Mystery.
639—The Sealed Envelope.
640—The Message in Blue.
641—A Dream of Empire.
642—The Detective's Disappearance.
643—The Midnight Marauders.
644—The Child of the Jungle.
645—Nick Carter's Satanic Enemy.
646—The Times Stolen.
647—The Great Diamond Syndicate.
648—The Queen of the Yellow Door.
649—The Triangle Clue.
650—The Hollingworth Puzzle.
651—The Affair of the Missing Bonds
652—The Green Box Clue.
653—The Fast-club Mystery.
654—The Mystery of a Hotel Room.
655—The Tragedy of the Well.
656—The Black Hand.
657—The Black Hand Nemesis.
658—A Masterly Trick.
659—A Dangerous Man.
660—The Secret Number.
661—The Castor Riddle.
662—A Tragedy of the Bowery.
663—Four Scraps of Paper.
664—The Secret of the Mine.
665—The Mystery of the Car.
666—Nick Carter's Master Struggle.
667—The Air-dial Robbers.
668—The Broken Latch.
669—Nick Carter's Golden Peril.
670—The Man with the Missing Thumb.
671—Felicia, the "Fence."
672—A Night with Nick Carter.
673—In the Nick of Time.
674—The Dictator's Treasure.
675—Pieces of Eight.
676—Behind the Mask.
677—The Green Patch.
678—The Drab Thread.
679—The Live-wire Clue.
680—The Vampires of the Tenements.
681—The Policy King Baffled.
682—Madman's Gig.
683—A Life at Stake.
684—Trailing a Secret Thread.
685—The Diamond Plate.
686—A Puzzle of Identities.
687—The Westervelt Option.
688—The Vanishing Heiress.

PRICE, FIVE CENTS PER COPY

If you want any back numbers of our weeklies and cannot procure them from your news-dealer, they can be obtained direct from this office. Postage-stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, 79-89 SEVENTH AVE., NEW YORK